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OR,
THE RUSTLERS of BUTTE CITY.

BY MAJ. DANIEL BOONE DUMONT,
OF THE U. S. A.

CHAPTER I.
THE RUSTLERS' EXIT.

It was a hard winter in Montana, where winter generally puts its work in pretty thoroughly.

Butte City had felt the elemental austerity quite severely, and had been worried by it in more ways than one.

Nearly all the roads were blocked up by heavy snows and drifts.

Travel in any direction was almost impossible, and Butte did not lack much of being isolated for the time being.

Under these circumstances business was necessarily dull, the inhabitants being reduced to the condition of the Yankees who had no other outlet for their commercial energy than swapping knives with each other.

The big mills were roaring away as usual, grinding ore at a great rate, and their furnace-fires gave a vivid look of life to the wintry scene, and plenty of precious metal was being

"YOU DID IT!" SHE CRIED, FIERCELY. "I HATE YOU FOR IT, AND WILL GET EVEN WITH YOU YET!"

extracted from the rock and put into marketable shape.

But though all this could afford no present relief to a snowed in community, yet this very inclement season witnessed the exodus of a considerable portion of the population of Butte City.

As may be readily guessed, it was not a voluntary exodus.

If Butte did not get its excitement in one way, it was sure to get it in another.

One frosty morning the population awoke to find a formidable array of posters on the dead walls and fences.

Nobody knew how or when they had been put there; but everybody knew what they meant.

The reading matter on the posters was brief but comprehensive, and above and below it were cabalistic figures that everybody understood.

It was in these words:

"Notice is hereby given to all thieves, gamblers, cut-throats and rustlers who have been preying on this community to leave camp within twenty-four hours."

Yes, everybody knew what it meant and where it came from.

The fact was recognized that the Vigilance Committee, which had formerly done effective service in ridding the camp of scoundrels and vagabonds, had organized anew for the purpose of meeting a pressing emergency.

It was generally admitted that an emergency existed which demanded prompt and energetic action.

The classes named in the proclamation had of late days rendered themselves so obnoxious that they had become a nuisance to Butte, if not an actual terror.

Even those among them who were not given to courses that were generally counted as criminal had been forced into them by the inclemency of the season and the exceeding toughness of the times.

As money was scarce, the harvest of the gamblers and others who lived upon the loose squanderings of the community was distressingly slim; hence they were compelled to find other and more objectionable ways of preying upon their fellow-men.

Thus it happened that the work of thieves and burglars became plentiful in Butte, while out-breaking crimes were more common than usual.

Therefore the proclamation, and the exodus.

Every man who was intended to be included in the edict of banishment knew that he was meant. He did not need any personal mention or any sort of explanation, but prepared to obey the order and make himself scarce without loss of time.

Badly as Butte had suffered from recent depredations, there was not lacking a certain amount of sympathy for the exiles.

Where would they go to, and what would become of them?

It was a dreadful thing to turn even a dog loose in such a country at such a season, and the edict seemed to be nothing less than merciless when it was enforced against men, no matter what might be their faults or crimes.

They could not go to Helena, as that town was closed against them, and other camps were inaccessible by reason of the snow blockade.

A few were able to scrape together money enough to pay their fares to Ogden; but for most of the exiles there was nothing to do but to foot it over the only route available, down the creek, and toward the South, and then—who could guess any further?

When spring should come, the disappearance of the snow might disclose skeletons scattered along the road or in the canyons, or hidden in clefts of rock, with nobody to care whose they had been or how they came there.

It might be, too, that cold and starvation would force some of the outcasts into deadly collision with ranchers down yonder, and that the ranchers would suffer.

The exiles must live—unless death should shut out all chances—and the strong arm would be prompted to take succor that was refused, or without asking for it.

So the exodus began before noon, and continued during the remainder of the day, and had not ceased when night set in.

Singly, or by twos or threes, the ex-citizens of Butte tramped away from the camp, some of them scantily clad, and scarcely any of them carrying anything but small bundles that represented their provender for the desolate journey.

A more comfortless and woebegone set of exiles—considering the hard circumstances attending their departure—it would be difficult to discover.

In front of Jim Hussey's "Elephant" saloon—known as the Baby Elephant because of its diminutive size—near the lower end of the main street, a man was standing, looking at the struggling procession as, in more senses than one, it "passed out."

This man was comfortably clad, wearing a shaggy overcoat and heavy boots, and a fur cap with earlaps covering his sandy hair, and his face was partially protected by an ample auburn beard.

There was nothing the matter with him, as far

as appearance went, and those of the stragglers who did not bestow glances of hate upon him as they passed by, regarded him with looks of envy.

Occasionally a bar-room loungeer would peer out of a dingy window from within, or Jim Hussey would step out for a minute or so to stare and chat.

But the comfortable man kept his position outside during the greater part of the afternoon, apparently taking account of stock of the exiles, and "sizing them up."

Toward evening a couple passed that attracted his attention.

They were a man and a girl.

The man was tall and stalwart, evidently past middle age, with dark but grizzled hair and beard, shabbily and not too warmly clothed, carrying a bundle slung from a stick over his shoulder.

His size dwarfed the girl, who was neither tall nor stout, and who was so wrapped up in her worn garments that scarcely anything could be seen of her countenance but a pair of flashing black eyes.

As they passed the saloon, Jim Hussey stepped out, and the comfortable man spoke to him, nodding his head toward the stragglers.

"Who are they, Jim?"

"They are Dick Herries and his daughter Kate. Thought you knew 'em, Mr. Slevin."

"Has Dick Herries come to that?"

"Didn't you know?"

"This is the first time I have seen him since I struck the camp. What a tumble he must have had!"

"About as big and quick a tumble as any man would care to take. Dick was a gay gambler, you know, and for a long time he held up his head with the best of 'em. Last fall he owned White Elephant, and ran it for all 'twas worth, and everybody thought he was makin' money hand over fist. He slung lots of style, and nothin' was too fine for that gal o' his."

"What pulled him down so badly?"

"Reckon it must ha' been the loss of his wife. Anyhow, after that critter scooted he was never the same man ag'in. He took to drink as a stiddy business, and that, you know, is too much for the best of us. His shebang was sold out from under him, and a while ago he was caught breakin' into it. That settled Dick Herries, and now he is counted as a reg'lar bad egg."

"Is it possible that his daughter is going away with him in such weather and such shape?"

"Reckon not. It must be that she jest wants to see the old man started and say good-by to him. I hear that she is engaged to sing and dance at her dad's old place, and mebbe she could support him now, if he was allowed to stay; but he ain't."

"What sort of a girl is she?"

"Mighty high-strung; but I don't know nothin' ag'inst her. Hadn't you better come in out of the cold, Mr. Slevin?"

Dick Herries and his daughter were nearly out of sight down the road.

Mr. Slevin did go in, and he gladdened the hearts of the loungeers by inviting them to "poison themselves" at his expense.

After a while he went out and resumed his former position.

It was dark, and but one person was in sight.

That person was Kate Herries, who was slowly returning up the snowy road, her face covered with her shawl to protect it from the cold wind.

As she drew near the Baby Elephant she changed her course to that side of the street, approaching more closely the man who was standing outside.

Then she stopped in front of him, dropping the shawl from her head.

The light that had been started in the saloon reached her through the dingy window, lighting up her features with a lurid glow.

It could then plainly be seen that her face was of rare beauty, though it showed traces of tears, and locks of her dark hair fell over it, and the fire that flashed from her dark eyes was tigerish in its gleam.

Suddenly she raised her right hand, ungloved and clinched, and shook it at the comfortable man.

"You did it!" she cried, fiercely. "I hate you for it, and will get even with you yet!"

CHAPTER II.

SILVER SAM, OF CENTRAL CITY.

WHEN she had fired her shot of hatred and defiance, Kate Herries gathered the shawl about her face again, and hurried away up the street.

The comfortable man, who was named Slevin, gazed after her with a look of mingled wonder and admiration, and a smile disturbed the frost on his mustache.

"What can the girl mean?" he muttered. "I had nothing to do with that business. I have made no sort of trouble for her or hers. Why should she hate me and fly at me in that fashion? I must try and find out what she means?"

He put up the collar of his coat, thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked slowly up the street, a good distance behind the girl.

The encounter between Kate Herries and Slevin had been witnessed by a few of the men in the saloon, and all had heard her fierce denunciation.

They looked at the door as if expecting him to run in there for refuge, and were disappointed when he failed to put in an appearance.

"I say, Jim," observed Buck Anstey, "that was a bitter blast the girl gave the man out there."

"It was that," answered Hussey. "Durned if I understand it."

"Why, it was plain enough. She charged him with running off her father, Dick Herries."

"Yes; but I don't see what he could have had to do with it. He didn't strike the camp till three days ago."

"But the notice to quit was put out just after he got here, you see."

"That don't count. You might as well say that the last snow-storm had somethin' to do with it. You know as well as I do who put up that notice to quit. That is, you may not know the men by name; but you know that they are Butte people, the same men who have straightened up things before. I hain't the least idea that that man had anythin' to do with it."

"Who is he, Jim?"

"Sam Slevin."

"And who is Sam Slevin?"

"Do you mean to say that you don't know Silver Sam, of Central City?"

"Oh, that chap? I don't know him, but have heard of him, of course. He cut quite a figure down there. Wasn't he a sheriff, or something of the sort?"

"I should say he was," growled Hussey, as if he considered the question superfluous. "He was marshal of Central City, and then sheriff of the county. You may bet your boots that he did cut a figure. If you had been a tough or a rustler about there, you would have known Silver Sam."

"How did he get that Silver Sam handle?"

"Well, there's a joke about that, and it was a pretty rough joke on Sam Slevin. It worried him a good bit for a while, I have heard; but I reckon he don't bother about it any more."

"He was a dashin' young chap when they first made him marshal down there, and the style he slung made some of the old-timers laugh."

"His togs were the finest he could get hold of, and were built sorter in the Mexican fashion, with a touch of theater business; but his strong pint was silver."

"His coat was nigh covered with round buttons of solid silver, and his hat had a silver band, and there was silver fixin's on his breeches and his boots, and he wore a heavy silver watch-chain and big silver scarf-pins and rings, to say nothin' of silver spurs and spur-chains, and his breech-loader and revolvers and knife were silvered up to the nines."

"To cut it short, I reckon he'd assay about a quarter of his weight in silver, and that is how the boys came to call him Silver Sam."

"Seems to me," remarked Buck Anstey, "that the assay would have shown up a right smart speck of durned fool."

"So some folks thought, and maybe they were partly right. But he got the durned foolishness knocked out of him in one round, and in a way he wasn't likely to forget."

"There was a gang that had been holdin' up stages, goin' through trains, and runnin' off stock about there for some time, and Big Bill Pettis, who was the boss of the gang, made his brags that no man or set of men could take 'em in."

"Sam Slevin said that he could clean 'em out, and that he meant to do it; so he set off alone—like a durned fool, as you may say—not so much to gobble 'em up by himself as to git onto their trails and hidin'-places."

"Bill Pettis got onto that little game, as he had his spies about, and was fixed for takin' a hand."

"One day when Sam loafed into a little shebang 'up in the hills, hopin' to pick up some pints there, he found a few bummers settin' around, the usual way, and asked 'em up to drink."

"They didn't mind if they did, and they sidled up to the bar and allowed him to settle for their sap."

"When he turned around, after payin' for the drinks, he faced five other men who were standin' there, and every man of the five held a pistol cocked and p'inted at him."

"They had the drop on him, dead."

"That's where the durned fool cropped out, seems to me," observed Anstey.

"Maybe it did and maybe it didn't. Anyhow, Silver Sam had sense enough to jump onto the facts and to know that there was no chance to squirm out of the scrape."

"Big Bill Pettis, who stood right afore him, ordered him to throw up his hands."

"I reckon Sam would about as lief ha' flung up his immortal soul; but he obeyed orders, like a good little boy."

"Then he war told to sit down, and he sot."

"Of course they took away from him all his

fine silver-plated weapons and his watch and spare change; but they did worse than that.

"Two of them held him while Bill Pettis cut off his silver buttons and every speck and show of silver about him, and what wouldn't come off was cut out.

"Then Bill Bettis stood him up and read him a lecture.

"It was a scorcher, from what I heard.

"He told Sam that gentlemen—such as Pettis and his gang, you know—would scorn to hurt such poor trash as he was; that they spared his life because he was a small circumstance and far beneath their notice; but, if they caught him foolin' around their trail any more, or makin' any attempt to take them in, they would jest string him up to the nearest tree.

"He ordered the gentleman from Central City to clear out afore he got kicked out, and not to trouble himself to take his loss.

"Sam Slevin sneaked off afoot, unarmed, and without a scrap of silver to carry."

Buck Anstey sneered at this description of the stripped condition of the redoubtable Sam.

"He must have cut a pretty figure when he got home," he remarked. "Should think that every man would have been ready to spit on him."

"He ain't the sort of chap that folks are likely to spit on," replied Hussey, "and he didn't go home for quite a while, but went to a friend of his in the hills and got healed, and then he started out a-gunnin' for that gang.

"All alone he started out, too, and you may say that the durned fool crops out ag'in; but the proof of the puddin' is in the eatin'."

"He hunted 'em down and picked 'em off one by one, and men who ought to know say that it war one of the toughest and best managed jobs ever done in these parts.

"He stopped the work of that gang for a certainty, and those he didn't wipe out he scattered and drove off.

"At last he came up on Big Bill Pettis himself, and they too had the stiffest kind of a set-to in the timber.

"It wound up by Sam gettin' the best of the man who had wiped his feet on him, and he tied the big galoot and drove him into Central City.

"The folks there had got hold of some hints of the story, and Sam told it all jest as it happened, and I never heard that any man seemed to want to spit on him.

"They hung Bill Pettis, and the name of Silver Sam stuck closer than ever to the young chap who brought him in.

"But he didn't bother himself much about slingin' style after that and he never wore any more silver to speak of. So you see, Buck Anstey, that if they was ever a speck of durned fool about Sam Slevin, he knew how to wipe it off."

"I give in," answered the other. "He is not the first fellow who has had his freshness rubbed off, and I reckon he must be a man all through. What is he here for?"

"That's more'n I can tell you. He may have business here, or may be jest lookin' around. But I hain't the least idee that he had anythin' more to do with the stampede to-day than you or I had."

"What was the girl pitching into him for, then?"

"Ask me an easier one. Women are women, and they are all unaccountable critturs at the best."

"She must have had good reason to believe that he was concerned in the notice to quit, or she would never have given him that blast."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Women are unaccountable, as I said, and girls sometimes get queer notions into their pretty heads."

CHAPTER III.

KATE'S DEBUT.

NOT only had the proprietorship of the White Elephant been changed, but the character of the establishment had been entirely altered.

Under the rule of Dick Herries, and during his palmy days, it had been devoted to big gambling and high-class drinking.

Money had changed hands there rapidly and in large amounts, and costly liquors had been lavishly dispensed and freely paid for.

But a change had come over the fortunes of Butte as well as over those of "Devil Dick" Herries, and the effects of the hard winter that made hard times were clearly visible in the White Elephant.

Gustav Hofner, the thrifty German into whose hands it had fallen, had eliminated the gambling element as being no longer profitable, and had turned the establishment into what he styled a Concert Hall.

That is to say, it was devoted to theatrical entertainments in the shape of variety performances, given by such stray "talent" as managed to strike the camp, and artists who were snowbound there, unable or unwilling to get away.

Generally they were unable, as the prices of admission had been put at low figures to suit the times, and salaries were none too big for the daily needs of the performers.

The scenery was scanty and tawdry, the decorations were worn and dirty, and the quality

of the liquors that were passed over the bar would not have pleased the palate of an epicure.

But the night of the day that witnessed the exodus of the rustlers was to be a boom for the White Elephant. It was to witness the first appearance on any stage of Kate Herries, the daughter of the former proprietor, and previous to her father's rapid downfall—the belle of Butte.

The excitement was such as in older and wealthier communities might attend the debut on the dramatic stage of a prominent "society lady."

To Kate Herries, however, it was anything but a joyful or elevating occasion.

She had carried herself so high and so haughtily, and had fallen so far and so hard, that it was a wonder the tumble did not break her up.

It was because of the interest her public appearance would excite that Gustav Hofner had given her an engagement, and had trained her to sing and dance at his Concert Hall.

Though she was expected to increase the receipts of his establishment largely, he had taken advantage of her necessities to grind her down in the matter of pay.

If her salary might have supported her father, as Jim Hussey suggested, it surely would not have been sufficient for his drinks and her clothes.

But it was not to be stretched to cover so much ground, as Dick Herries had been ordered off with the rest of the rustlers, and Hofner had even refused her an advance to pay his railroad fare to Ogden.

She could have got money easily enough from men who were more selfish and vicious than charitable, and who would have been glad enough to place her in a position of comfort if she had been willing to accept the attendant infamy; but Kate Herries was not that kind of a girl—not by a large majority! She was as proud as Lucifer and as true as steel!

She had accepted Hofner's offer because necessity compelled her to do so, and had taken up her new business in a business way because she saw no other way of making an honest living, and she meant to make an honest living or none.

It was hard that her father had been driven away just as she was about to make her debut; but that was only one of the heavy burdens that cruel fate obliged her to bear. She would bear it bravely for his sake, as well as for her own.

If she could not help him then, she might be able to render him needed assistance at some future time. That is to say, if he should live through the terrible trial to which his expulsion from Butte subjected him.

Gustav Hofner was justified in his expectations of the interest that would be excited by the first appearance of Kate Herries. His theater was crowded to its utmost capacity, and standing room was at a premium.

The adjuncts of the former saloon had been cleared away, so that one big room was the result, and the stage was necessarily at the rear, leaving the rest of the space for the auditorium and the bar.

The bar, which was near the entrance, and but slightly screened from the view of the stage, did a lively business, and the smoke of cigars and pipes arose from the crowded audience until the air was heavy and the lights were obscured.

All classes and conditions of the community were there, with the exception of women, from the wealthiest man in Butte to the poorest miner or day laborer.

The performance was the usual style of variety entertainment, perhaps as good as most of its kind. It might not have satisfied a connoisseur, but it tickled the sensibilities of Butte.

The audience greeted with good humor the antics of the inevitable pair of darkies and the usual exaggerated Irishman, and listened sympathetically and in silence to the efforts of a ballad-singer with a high-sounding name.

But it was evident that they were waiting with eager anticipation for the appearance of Kate Herries.

When her number came, as announced on the programme, there was a dead silence in the auditorium, which was not even broken by the clinking of glasses.

But the din was deafening when the curtain rose and she stepped forth upon the stage.

The roars and thunders of applause might have sufficed to disconcert any tyro; but she was not in the least appalled or put out.

Through the clouds of smoke, as through a mist, she could be seen bowing and smiling in answer to the storm of welcome, as calm and self-possessed as if such occurrences had been her nightly experience for years.

The liberality of the manager had not been sufficient to provide her with anything splendid or startling in the way of stage apparel, and her cheap finery was not calculated to enhance her charms.

It was, moreover, as modest as the circumstances of her position would allow; but it was made in the most perfect taste, and worn with the most absolute grace.

You might throw a rag on Kate Herries, some of her admirers were wont to say, and she would still outlook a princess.

Even in her dingy surroundings, with her

cheap attire, and seen through a haze of smoke, she was thoroughly charming, and there were plenty to say that she had never looked more lovely in the days of her pride and splendor.

But she was only a girl then, unformed and a little gawky, and now she had suddenly blossomed into a woman.

She went through her "act"—one of the catch-songs of the day, with a bit of dancing interspersed in the usual way—as if she had been bred to the business, and to the very evident satisfaction of the audience.

Not much musical ability was required for this performance, and but little knowledge of dancing; but Kate Herries had a fine voice, and knew how to use it, and she also knew how to adapt the twinkling of her feet to the temper of the admiring crowd.

She smiled and gestured, and played all the little arts and graces required by her "act," with the self-possession and aplomb of an old hand at the business.

At the end of the piece, the applause was terrific, and the audience fairly rose and shouted to demand an encore.

She came out again and sung a ballad without the accompaniment of a dance.

Another encore was demanded and given, being the extreme limit allowed by the programme.

The debutante had but one other number during the entertainment, which was given in the same style as her previous performance, with similar demands for her reappearance.

It was universally admitted that her success was complete, and there could be no doubt that the sympathetic audience was glad that she had done so well.

Sam Slevin occupied a seat during the performance from which he could see all that went on, without being a bit conspicuous.

There was no more interested spectator of Kate Herries's performances than he, though he did not join in the stamping and shouting of which the applause was mostly made up.

No doubt he thought, as the girl smiled and posed before the crowd, of the same girl as he had seen her shivering in the cold street when she tramped away with her banished father, and of the words of hatred and defiance which she had flung at him so fiercely when she returned.

No doubt he wondered, too, whether she could, by any chance, be thinking of the fate of her father, who might then be freezing to death on the snow-covered southwest trail, if not already dead of exposure.

If he had been better acquainted with Kate Herries, he might have known that just that was what she was thinking of. He might have known that it was the one thought which kept coming up to oppress her, rising in her throat to choke her. He might have known, too, that she resolutely thrust it down and crushed it, determined that she would not permit her pain and terror to interfere with the business she had set herself to do.

Then he would have praised her as a real heroine, and have been ready to fall down and worship her.

Among the tokens of admiration that Kate Herries received was one which strongly attracted the attention of Sam Slevin, if no other person took particular notice of it.

It was a bouquet.

Bouquets are customary and frequent gifts on such occasions in other communities, and at other times; but in that town, and at that season, they were out of the question.

There were no hothouses in Butte.

In flush times gold and silver pieces had been flung on the stage pretty freely to greet a popular performer; but money was scarce in Butte just then, and dollars were dollars.

The bouquet, therefore, was the only gift that was thrown to the fair debutante.

It was a fine one, necessarily of hothouse flowers, and Sam Slevin's attention was naturally drawn to the giver.

Of course it had been sent by express from some Southern city, for the purpose of being used on this occasion, and it represented no small amount of money.

It was easy to make sure of the man who threw the floral tribute, as he sat near the orchestra, and stood up for the purpose of giving good effect to his throw.

He was a tall man, dark-haired and dark of feature, not at all what might be called a handsome man.

He seemed to be a person of forty or upward, but it was quite possible that he looked older than he was, in spite of his evident endeavor to look young.

He was well dressed—almost elegantly, in fact—and was easily one of the most conspicuous persons in the crowd.

Sam Slevin could not have said what it was that drew his attention so particularly to this man, unless it was the bouquet; but he did observe him very closely, taking in every particular of his personal appearance.

The man of the bouquet was Andrew Birkett, mine-owner, speculator, and adventurer in general.

He had lately been pointed out to Slevin as one of the most rapidly rising men of Butte.

CHAPTER IV.

A COWARDLY ASSAULT.

SAM SLEVIN did not await the end of the entertainment.

He left the house shortly after the close of Kate Herries's last performance, when a considerable portion of the audience filtered out, as if it was only to see the *debutante* that they had come there.

He had noticed one point that interested him in connection with the throwing of the bouquet.

Though Andrew Birkett was in full view of Kate when he made his fling, and though the bunch of flowers fell almost at her feet, she did not appear to perceive the thrower or his gift.

Indeed, she might have gone off without touching the bouquet, if it had not been for a person connected with the stage, who picked it up and handed it to her.

She took it just as she was bowing her way off in response to the last round of applause.

To Sam Slevin, who was quick at drawing conclusions, it seemed that some personal objection to the giver must have prevented her from picking up the flowers.

He gave no further thought to the matter, but loafed about for a while on the sidewalk in front of the Concert Hall and in two neighboring saloons.

As he loafed he listened with some interest and amusement to the comments of the bystanders upon the performance, and especially upon the appearance and conduct of Kate Herries.

The comments were mostly enthusiastic in her praise; but mingled with them were personal remarks concerning her and her father which somehow grated on the ears of Sam Slevin.

Having heard all he cared to hear, he sauntered up one of the few streets along the mountain-side which included the habitable portion of Butte.

He noticed as he passed by Hofner's Concert Hall, that the entertainment was ended and the establishment was closed.

The night was cloudless, and was also moonless, but the big stars, bigger and brighter there than in a lower region and a denser atmosphere, were all out and attending to business.

Slevin slowly walked up the street a short distance, and then turned a corner.

As he did so he heard a woman's scream behind him.

He turned quickly, retracing his steps to the street he had left. There he saw a girl struggling in the grasp of a man.

"Let me go!" she was crying indignantly. "I don't want to have anything to do with you. You are a coward to insult me so."

"Just a moment," replied the man. "I want you to listen to me. Why did you refuse my flowers?"

Sam was approaching them swiftly and silently, and in their excitement neither of them noticed him.

"I want nothing to do with you or your flowers," cried Kate. "Let me go, I say!"

"I won't do it. I have got you now, and mean to keep you. You had better give in, or—"

A grip of iron was on his neck, and the words were choked in his throat.

"Let the young lady go!" ordered Sam.

He emphasized his command by a jerk that sent Kate's assailant reeling away from her.

Birkett quickly recovered himself, and his right hand sought his hip-pocket, but he had hardly drawn his pistol, when a kick from Sam Slevin sent it whirling through the air, and it fell in the street.

The next instant Kate's defender leveled a shining revolver at his head.

"Your game is played out," observed Sam. "The best thing you can do is to go right along and behave yourself."

"Who are you, you intermeddling hound?" angrily demanded Andrew Birkett.

"I think you know me. My name is Sam Slevin!"

"You shall pay for this, whoever you are."

"All right. You can easily find me whenever you want to settle with me. And I give you fair warning that if you annoy this lady again, or meddle with her in any way, I will have an account to settle with you."

"I wish her joy of her champion," muttered Birkett, as he sullenly moved away.

Sam turned to the girl.

She had not moved since he freed her from Andrew Birkett's grasp; but there was no expression of thankfulness on her face as he looked at her.

It was, indeed, a sullen and rebellious glance that she gave him, and its meaning was speedily made plain.

"It is you, then," she said. "I wish it hadn't been. I would almost rather—"

"Rather have been left in the clutches of that man? Not quite that, I hope."

"There is an old saying about falling out of the fryingpan into the fire."

"But it don't apply to me. You are quite safe with me, whatever you may think. Why do you hate me so, Miss Herries?"

"You know why, I told you why. Because you drove my father away in the dead of winter

—drove him off to die—and he may be frozen this bitter night."

The terrible thought overcame her, and she burst into tears.

"There is a big mistake out," said Slevin. "I had nothing more to do with that business than any baby in arms."

"I know better."

"I hope to be able to teach you better than you know. You must let me accompany you as far as your house, to make sure that you are safe. What has happened once may happen again."

"I would hate to be found dead in your company."

"Let us hope that you will not be found dead in any company or out of it. How did you get it into your head that I drove your father away from Butte?"

"He told me so."

"Yes, and he believed it, no doubt. But who told him?"

"I am not sure, but I think it was Andrew Birkett."

"Ah! I was sure that there was a swindle out, and now, I begin to see into the game. I believe that you and I can easily straighten out the tangle. But we must move on, Miss Herries, as it is too cold for standing here. I am positively going to see you safe home, and we can talk this matter over as we walk."

There must have been something in Sam Slevin's words and manner that caused Kate Herries to reconsider her objections to his company.

She walked on at his side, and was no longer unwilling to listen to what he had to say.

"Andrew Birkett is the man who was worrying you just now," he remarked. "Do you consider him a friend of yours—I mean a true and honest friend?"

"I am sure that he is not," she replied.

"You have sized him up, and have settled that point. You haven't tried me yet; but I want you to try me. By their fruits ye shall know them, as the Good Book says. Now I want to say to you that when that man told your father that I was responsible for that business, he lied. I don't know why he lied, or why he wanted to put that job up on me; but he told a lie that did not have the shadow of a leg to stand on. Ask any people you know about me. Some of the folks here are acquainted with me, and many of them have heard of me. There are plenty of men in these parts who hate me; but I doubt if my worst enemy would say that I was ever caught in a lie. I want you to believe in me."

"You almost make me believe," responded Kate. "But why should that man have told father such a story?"

"That is a question which you and I must find an answer for."

Kate stopped at a shabby little tenement on the hillside.

"Is this your home, Miss Herries? I will say good-night, then. But I wish you to understand that I want to be a friend to you—a true and honest friend—and I am vain enough to believe that my friendship is worth having. Let me say right now that if you mean to keep on performing at the Concert Hall, you must not live so far from it. Another place must be found for you. May I come up here in the morning and speak to you about it?"

After a moment's hesitation Kate said that he might come.

He bade her good-night as respectfully as if he were addressing one of the first ladies of the land.

CHAPTER V.

DICK HERRIES'S FALSE FRIEND.

THE next morning Sam Slevin visited Kate Herries at her house on the hill, and found her, if not in a very friendly mood, at least willing to listen to the suggestions he saw fit to make for her safety and comfort.

He had, also, a good chance to see her by daylight, and, to use one of his favorite phrases, to "size her up."

If he had previously been struck by her beauty and by a certain style there was about her, he was then deeply impressed.

Her face had a way of lighting up that was very fascinating, and there was something in her manner that greatly pleased Sam Slevin.

Good, true, brave and loyal, with abundant capacity for enjoying and suffering—that was the way he read her character.

He had heard it said, the night before, that Kate Herries had "a pepper-hot temper;" but he soon discovered what sort of a temper it was, and considered it a possession worth having.

She was not one who would submit to being crushed, as long as she was able to fight; yet she would bear pain and sorrow without a murmur when there was no chance to help herself.

Without recurring to the painful subject of the exodus of the rustlers, Slevin explained to her the arrangements he proposed as best for her in her present position.

She appreciated his thoughtfulness, perceived the justice of his suggestions, and acquiesced in

them more readily than he could have expected her to.

He did not put himself forward, or incur any risk of making talk against her by taking the task of providing for her safety and comfort on his own shoulders, but simply placed her in the way of settling herself properly.

He told her where to go, what to do, and how to do it.

Indeed, he had already prepared the path for her, and all she had to do was to walk in it and follow his directions.

She did so, after thanking him for his care and kindness, and was surprised to see how easily and agreeably she could suit herself.

It seemed as if everybody with whom she had anything to do had expected her, and was more than ready to meet her half-way.

It was not much after noon when she found herself pleasantly and comfortably situated in a warm room at a little distance from the Concert Hall.

She was so entirely satisfied with her new surroundings, that she had only one thought to trouble her—that was of her father, who must be suffering in his enforced exile, if he had not already perished.

Whither would he go, and what would he do, and what would become of him?

He had only a dollar or so in money, was insufficiently clothed, and had been weakened physically by his recent dissipation.

With his loss of bodily vigor he had lost the nerve and dash by which he had formerly been distinguished, and was in no respect anything like the man he had been.

Yet she felt that he deserved pity, more than blame, and her heart went out to him in his wandering.

If it had not been for his positive refusal to allow her to do so, she would have wandered away with him and shared his fate.

Possibly it might in some degree ease her mind if she could confide in Sam Slevin, and ask his opinion concerning the exile and his chances.

She determined to do so.

Already she had begun to look up to him, if not to rely upon, and she wondered how she could have spoken to him so severely and savagely when she first met him.

He was so strong, so clear-sighted, so helpful, and so considerate.

Surely there could be nothing wrong about him, and he must be a friend worth having.

If Kate Herries ever needed a friend, that was the time, and this one seemed to have been sent to meet her special requirements.

She soon had an opportunity to extend to him any confidence that her better nature might prompt.

Sam Slevin called at her new place in the afternoon, and had an hour's talk with her before her presence was required at the Concert Hall.

After a little preliminary conversation she mentioned her father, inquiring of her visitor concerning his chances of surviving and reaching a place of safety.

"Just now we can only hope for the best," answered Slevin. "But, suppose we try to settle these matters one at a time, and then we may get along better. Are you still of the opinion that I had anything to do with running off any of the men?"

"I am not," she promptly replied. "I believe what you say."

It seemed to Sam Slevin just then that he must be a strong sort of a man who could deliberately tell a lie when her eyes were looking into his.

"I am glad of that," he said. "It makes things much plainer and easier. But it is queer that your father should have believed that tale. I have been here but a few days, and I have nothing to do with managing matters here in Butte."

"He gave me his reasons," answered Kate. "He said that you had made yourself a terror to rough characters in other places than Central City. The trouble began, as he said, directly after you came here, and Andrew Birkett told him that you were the cause of it."

"There is just a shade of reason in that, but I can't help thinking that your father must have been a bit weak in the head when that idea was stuffed into his skull. Perhaps, though, he believed in Birkett. If so, we may get nearer to the point. Was that man a particular friend of your father's?"

"I suppose he may be called a friend. Father was more intimate with him lately than with any one else."

"Lately, you say. Since when?"

The girl cast down her eyes.

"We had a dreadful misfortune," she said. "My mother left us. That is, people said that she left us of her own accord. She went away from Butte. She disappeared, and there was no trace of her to be found."

"Yes, I know. You need not go into particulars. Was it then that your father became intimate with Andrew Birkett?"

"About that time, though he had known him before. Father went wild, as they said. He never seemed to be right in his head after that."

He began to drink heavily, and let other men run his business until there was nothing left of it to run. He played, as I was told, rashly and foolishly, and anybody could fleece him."

"They considered him fair game, I suppose, and went for him," observed Slevin.

"That is the truth, I am afraid. I know that he lost a large sum of money at cards to Andrew Birkett. Then he borrowed money from Birkett, and kept on borrowing, until he was entirely broken up, and found himself without a dollar."

"Why did he not borrow from Birkett, then, when he needed money to take him away?"

"When father had lost his business, Andrew Birkett refused to lend him any more money, and only at the last moment came forward to tell him that you were the cause of his being driven away."

"Why he should have done that, Miss Herries, is what puzzles me, and I can only guess that he may have wanted to avert suspicion from himself."

"What sort of suspicion?" asked Kate, in surprise.

"It seems to be plain enough that the man your father supposed to be his best friend was his worst enemy. As I look at the matter now, Andrew Birkett was largely responsible for the ruin of Dick Herries, and it is quite likely that he caused your father to be sent away, so that he might have free scope for his designs upon you."

"What designs?" exclaimed Kate.

"You ought to be better able to answer that question than I am. His performance last night gave me a hint of what he means, and I suppose that is not the first move he has made. How is that?"

"He has worried me with his attentions," answered Kate, "and has asked me to be his wife. But I would as soon marry a snake."

"And he understands that, no doubt. I judge that he means to win you, by fair means or foul, and knows that fair means won't work. Anyhow, what I saw last night was enough to make me say that you will need to be on your guard against him, and I propose to furnish a guard for you. May I call up a friend of mine?"

Kate assented, wonderingly, and he left the room.

He returned shortly, followed by a strange specimen of humanity.

This person was somewhat shorter than men average, but considerably wider, and most compactly built.

His broad shoulders and thick loins spoke of unusual strength, and his long arms contrasted strangely with his short and bowed legs.

Evidently he was built for fighting, rather than for running.

His features were intensely ugly.

Hairy tufts were scattered over his face, which was also adorned with strange knobs and distortions, and his shapeless and twisted nose made him look like a victim of a gunpower explosion.

The same explosion might be supposed to have stretched the gash in his face which served him by way of a mouth.

He was coarsely but warmly clad, and a ragged fur cap covered his shock of black hair.

"This, Miss Herries," said Sam Slevin, "is Muggs, of Muggsville. I don't know whether he has another name. What's your handle, my friend?"

"Simon," briefly answered Muggs.

"Simon it is, then. He is generally known as Muggs, without any frills; but you may call him what you please, Miss Herries, and you may bet your immortal soul that he will come when you call him. He is to be the guard I spoke of."

"What is he to do?" asked Kate, who was not enraptured by the appearance of this grinning Cerberus.

"He will keep an eye on you—two eyes, for that matter, and right sharp ones they are. When you go to that Concert Hall, and when you come home at night—more especially when you come home—he will be about, and will watch you closely. The chances are that you will never know that he is near you; but he will be there, all the same, and no person can harm you without putting an end to the earthly pilgrimage of Muggs. Is that so, Muggs?"

"Betcher life, boss!"

"All right; you may go."

When Muggs had left the room Sam Slevin defined the nature and purpose of this ugly ally a little more plainly.

"I want to make it as sure as I can," he said, "that no harm comes to you while I am gone."

"You are going away, then?"

"I am going to try to find out what has become of your father."

"How good you are! I do not deserve it. To think that I should have hated you so fiercely, and spoken to you so savagely, and that now you are doing so much for me! How can I ever thank you?"

"Think of me as kindly as you can, and rely upon me, and believe that I want to do my best to serve you. That is all I ask."

CHAPTER VI.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

It was a sad farewell scene between Dick Herries and his daughter, in that freezing weather, as darkness was beginning to settle down upon the snowbound camp.

"If I could only go with you, father," moaned Kate. "I am sure that I could stand it as well as you can, and perhaps I might be a help to you."

"I don't deserve your sympathy, Kate. I have not been such a father to you as I should have been, and you know it. Besides, you would be more of a hindrance than a help to me, and I can go through this much better alone."

"But I am afraid for you, father. If you are to die, I want to die with you."

"There's no die about it, girl. I am more of a man yet than you think. I am a bit shaky just now, and own it; but I will brace up, and will pull through. Perhaps it is better as it is."

"You have a bottle of whisky in your pocket, father. Please be careful how you use it. It is dangerous."

"No man knows that better than I do, and you may trust me, dear. Run along, now. It will soon be dark."

"I will remember that man who made them drive you out of the camp, and will find a way to make him suffer for that."

"Go easy, Kate, go easy. I don't know what grudge he may have had against me, and perhaps it is all for the best. You must not get into any sort of trouble on my account. Run along, Kate, and don't fret about me."

She kissed him good-by and hurried away up the snowy street, making no pause until she met Sam Slevin.

Dick Herries looked after her but once, casting but one hasty glance backward; then he passed a hand over his eyes, and tramped away from Butte.

He had told Kate that there was more of the man about him than she might think, and the present emergency was calculated to test his manhood to the utmost—to try his powers of restraint as well as of endurance.

Silent and alone he tramped away down the only trail that was open from the snowbound camp to the outer world.

Other exiles had preceded him, and others were to follow him; but there was little companionship among those comrades in misfortune.

Perhaps they feared each other even more than they dreaded the common enemy.

Night succeeded twilight, and the big stars came out in the clear sky, their cold light making the snow-covered mountains and valleys look yet bleaker and more desolate.

Fortunately there was no wind, but the cold was intense.

It was not as bad as it might have been, as a blizzard would speedily have strewn the trail with corpses; but it was bad enough, in all conscience.

The air was charged with frost, and the icy particles stung like needles.

Every moment it grew colder; or it must have seemed to Dick Herries that it did so, as the frosty air penetrated his scanty clothing and chilled his enfeebled frame.

While Kate Herries was singing and dancing and bowing and smiling before an enraptured audience at Butte, her father was shivering with cold on his lonely tramp, and the thin blood in his veins was nearly at the point of congelation.

No doubt he thought of her as he walked, and drew a vivid picture of the performance. If so, he must have painfully contrasted his position with hers, thankful that she was so much better off than he was.

She was safe and comfortable for the present, at least, and he was painfully aware of the fact that he would have been a drag upon her, rather than a help to her, if he had remained in Butte.

He had fallen fast and far, and had pulled her down with him; but he meant to lead a different life, and to become a better man, if he should safely pass through this terrible ordeal.

His resolution was to be put to the severest possible test.

It did not look as if he could survive that night. The frost was invading his veins, and momentarily his progress became more difficult.

Naturally he felt the need of something to brace him up—something that would warm and stimulate him.

He had brought from Butte a bottle of whisky—a flat flask that held a quart—and it was full.

He had not touched it yet; but the time had come when it would be useful to him, if ever.

He took the bottle from the breast-pocket of his coat, and held it up to the starlight. But he smiled sardonically as he viewed it, without showing any symptoms of a desire to draw the cork.

"I know you," he said, "and you can't fool me any more. You won't freeze, yourself; but you can freeze the life out of a man. You warm

him up as you go down, and make him fancy that you are a good thing; but you turn the blood in his veins to water, and fit it for the frost to take hold. You make him think that you are putting life into his limbs, when you are only creeping into his head and stealing away the senses upon which he must depend for life."

"One taste of you leads to another, and more forces a man to take more, and then comes the stupor that lets him freeze to death without knowing what has happened. No, you can't fool me now. If I have got to die, I will die sober!"

He replaced the flask in his pocket, and slowly and painfully trudged on—more slowly and more painfully, until step after step became more difficult to take.

The cold was stiffening his limbs and benumbing his faculties, and he was gradually losing control of himself.

Surely it would not be possible for him to live through that bitter cold night.

He felt that it was not possible; but the prospect of death did not displease him.

It could hardly be other than a painless death, and what could he ask better than that?

Already the sensation of cold was leaving him, replaced by an almost delicious feeling of languor.

He was so sleepy that he wanted nothing but to lie down and rest.

Finally, as he was about to yield to this overpowering desire, he spied a light across the creek, at the right of the road.

It was only a little point of light, and the wonder was that he had happened to see it; but it was a yellow light, such as is given by an oil lamp, and it spoke of human life and proximity.

Then Dick Herries remembered that there was a ranch in that locality, in the shelter of a valley that formed the mouth of a canyon.

It had been quite a famous place of resort in the staging days, but had lost that line of business, and had become a ranch of no special value.

There was no path that led to it from the road; but the light proved that it was not deserted, and the crusted snow would easily bear the weight of a man.

The discovery of the light put new life and purpose into Dick Herries.

He was no longer possessed by the desire to lie down in the snow to rest, but was inspired with a desperate resolve to reach the ranch and ask for succor.

If it should be refused, he might as well die there as elsewhere.

He was spurred on by the thought of his daughter, and the hope that he might yet live to see her again.

He crossed the creek on the snow that overlaid the frozen water, and put all his remaining energy into the effort to push forward toward the ranch.

It was with the greatest difficulty that he was able to drag his feet, which seemed, instead of supporting him, to have become a burden which he must bear.

At the same time he was oppressed by a drowsiness which he was unable to shake off; but there was the light, glimmering like a beacon of hope, and surely he would be safe if he could reach it.

Again and again he was on the point of sinking and giving up the struggle in spite of himself; but again and again he summoned up his failing energies, and pushed forward, his teeth set, and his eyes fixed on nothing but the light.

Suddenly he stumbled and fell into a path cut in the snow, which he had failed to see.

The slight shock of the fall helped him.

When he had picked himself up, the walls of the snow-path were decidedly an assistance, as they held him up when he swayed in his weakness to one side or the other, and he had nothing to do but to press forward.

He could no longer see the light; but the path was another assurance of life and safety, and of course it led to the light.

He dragged himself onward until he came to the end of the path.

There was a cabin with a small space cleared in front of it, and through a little window shone the light which he had been following.

A reaction came when he found himself so close to the realization of his hope.

His energies refused to respond to any further call upon them, and he fell forward against the closed door of the cabin.

CHAPTER VII.

A GOOD SAMARITAN.

"Who's there?" demanded a deep voice from within.

Dick Herries's fall against the door, and the faint cry he uttered as he fell, had aroused somebody, and the click of the lock of a rifle or a pistol showed that the somebody apprehended danger.

This was the supreme moment.

The freezing man must speak, or he might be mistaken for a wild beast and left to perish.

"A man," he feebly answered. "I am freezing!"

"Who air you, and whar have you come from?"

"From Butte—driven away with the rest. But I am freezing, and will die here unless you let me in."

"What is your name?"

"Dick Herries."

There was a quick step inside, followed by the drawing of the bars, and the door was thrown wide open.

Dick Herries caught a glimpse of a large man and a bright fire, and then he saw no more.

Then the large man acted strangely.

Instead of bringing the stranger in and closing the door, he rushed out, filled his two hands with snow, and applied it freely to Herries's nose and ears, rubbing it on, but not too briskly.

Then he filled a basin with snow, and carried it inside.

At the same time the cold air was pouring in; but he did not mind that.

When he had carried in the basin of snow, he lifted the stranger tenderly, and carried him in, and not until then did he close the door of the cabin.

But his movements had been rapid and to the purpose, and not a moment's time had been lost.

Instead of taking the stranger to the fire, he laid him on the floor, at as great a distance from it as the size of the room would allow; then he hastened to strip off his garments and rub his limbs with snow from the basin.

Having done all he cared to do in this direction, he lifted his patient upon a bed, threw a blanket over him, and left him lying there.

When Dick Herries recovered his senses, he found himself in a comfortable room, with a good fire blazing at the end opposite to him.

His host was bending over the hearth, engaged in some culinary operation.

Herries's stirring, and the faint cry with which he announced his return to existence, reached the ears of the man at the fire, and he rose and turned around.

"So you're awake," said he. "I allowed that you'd come around arter a bit. Reckon you may as well come toward the fire now, if you can fetch it."

Dick Herries strove to rise; but the effort was too much for him just then.

"Wait a minute," said his host, "and I'll come and help you."

He set a coffee-pot on some coals in a corner of the hearth, went to the bed, helped Dick Herries to put on a portion of his clothes, and then partly led and partly carried him to the fire at the other end of the room, where he placed him in a comfortable seat.

Herries looked at him then, and "sized him up" as well as his physical and mental condition would let him.

He saw a large man, both tall and stout, apparently about fifty years of age, with abundant brown hair and beard only slightly grizzled, roughly but comfortably clothed, and a general appearance of good-humored sturdiness.

If ever honesty was written all over a human countenance, the record was plain on that man's face.

An honest ranchman, evidently, and a man to be depended on at all times and under all circumstances.

"Who are you, my friend?" inquired Dick Herries.

"My name is Stephen Boreman, and I am right glad to see you, Dick Herries."

"Glad to see me? That is queer."

"Right glad to see you, I say, though I was sorry to find you in such a bad fix. It was touch and go with you, mister, and you didn't fetch up here a minute too soon. Your ears and nose would have been gone, sure, if I hadn't happened to know the symptoms and how to do the right thing."

"They feel rather funny now," remarked Herries, "and I am almost too weak to talk."

"Don't try to talk, then. Mebbe you ought to have some whisky; but I hain't got a drop in the house."

"There is a great bottle full of it in my pocket, Mr. Boreman, and you are welcome to it if you will have it. I shall never touch it, myself."

"If you don't feel the need of it, you are better off without it. Take a tin of hot coffee, now, and then you must try to eat a bit."

Stephen Boreman poured out some steaming coffee for his guest, without milk, and sweetened with brown sugar, and Dick Herries found it delicious.

It seemed to warm and invigorate him almost immediately.

Then he ate some broiled bacon and hard bread as he sipped his coffee.

"It sounded strange to me, Mr. Boreman," said he, "when you told me that you were glad to see me. Did you hear me say that I had been driven out of Butte with the rest of them?"

"I heard suthin' of the sort, but didn't ketch on to the meanin' of it."

Dick Herries took from his pocket a copy of the Butte Vigilance Committee's notice to quit, which he had picked up and preserved, perhaps as a reminder of the sad experience that followed his rapid downfall.

He unfolded it and handed it to Stephen Boreman.

The ranchman read it carefully, and with visible indications of displeasure.

"That's what I called a cussed shame," he said. "It would have been more merciful to shoot the men, or even to hang 'em, than to send 'em adrift at this season of the year. It's the toughest winter I ever knew, and I couldn't turn a stray dog out of the house in such weather."

"It was more than kind of you to welcome one of those outcasts," remarked Herries.

"Not a bit of it. I've only begun to pay a part of the debt I owe you."

"The debt you owe me?"

"Jest that. I don't know what they've got against you up in Butte, but you're more than welcome to Steve Boreman's shanty. Why, Mr. Herries, if I'd known that you were out on the road, I'd ha' traveled miles to find you and bring you in."

Dick Herries did not attempt to conceal his surprise at this announcement.

"I can't understand this," he said. "I don't remember meeting you anywhere. What have I ever done for you?"

"I never saw you afore this night, Dick Herries; but you've done a heap for me."

"What is it?"

"You saved my boy Dave from goin' to the devil head-foremost."

"Indeed! I know nothing about it. I am curious to learn the particulars."

"You shall have them. Between three and four months ago Dave came here with a good pile of money, and went up to Butte to see the sights and find out what kind of fun there was a-goin'."

"He found a durned sight too much fun, and got just full enough to want to fight the tiger, which was the quickest and easiest way he could think of to git rid of the money he had worked so hard for."

"He went into your place, and you were on deck, and you took him in hand. You won a couple of hundred from him as slick as a whistle, and then you gave him back the money, and gave him a solid, settin'-down sort of a lecture with it. You wound up by showin' him jest how the thing was done, and provin' to him that he had no more chance at that sort o' game than a lamb in a pack o' coyotes."

"He wasn't so far gone but what he took it in straight, and was very thankful for the lesson. He sobered up right off, and came home and told me all about it; and we both swore that you was the biggest trump in the pack, and that we would try to git even with you if we ever struck the chance. That's the debt I owe you, Mr. Dick Herries."

"It seems to me that you are making a good bit out of a small matter, my friend. I don't remember anything of the circumstances you mention; but I may say that I was not in the habit of skinning green young fellows, preferring to put them in the right track. It was enough for me to shear the wolves, and I used to fleece them so thoroughly that I made plenty of enemies among them."

"Put it any way you please, Mr. Herries. It was a big thing for Dave and me. And now I want you to go right to bed, as sleep is the thing you need more'n anythin' else."

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK HERRIES'S FRESH START.

DICK HERRIES slept well during the remainder of the night, and did not awake until a late hour in the morning, as his kind host refrained from stirring, so that the guest might receive the full refreshment of a sound sleep.

When he got up and dressed, he found himself though rather weak, feeling brighter and better than he had felt in a long time.

It was quite a while, indeed, since he had gone to bed sober, and he appreciated the improvement in his condition.

A hot breakfast, the best that Stephen Boreman's ranch could afford, put new life and vigor into him, and he was surprised at the appetite he had for bacon and corn bread.

When he had finished his breakfast, he was for setting out immediately.

It was in vain that Stephen Boreman begged him to stay there and make the ranch his home as long as he could content himself to remain.

He could not content himself to stay another hour, declaring that something was calling him on, and that action was absolutely necessary to his existence.

"I can get down to Virginia City or Bannock well enough," he said, "and there I will find work of some kind. I shall get on in some way, now that I have taken a fresh start. I have no fears on that score."

He took his flask of whisky from his coat-pocket, and set it on the table.

"If you want that stuff, my friend," he observed, "I will leave it here, as I have no further use for it."

"I don't seem to have any call for anythin' in that line," replied the ranchman. "Mebbe you had better take it along, as you might need it."

"I shall not need it. That is what put me where I am, and I have had enough of it. But I will take it with me, just for the pleasure of resisting the temptation to touch it."

Stephen Boreman prepared a bag of provisions

for his guest, and begged him to accept a considerable sum of money; but Dick Herries positively refused to take a dollar.

"You have done enough for me, my friend," said he. "If you owed me any debt, or fancied that you owed it, you have more than settled the account by saving my life. You may be sure that I will never forget you; but I want to start clear, and depend on myself to help myself."

The ranchman gave him directions for his route, including distances and stopping-places where he might find food and shelter, and Dick Herries crossed the creek and struck the southern trail again.

The day was bright, and the air, though frosty, was clear and invigorating.

Dick Herries was astonished to perceive how well and strong he felt, how lightly and easily he carried himself, and how rapidly hope rose in his breast.

His only trouble then was the thought of Kate, who was necessarily exposed to many dangers in the calling she was compelled to follow, and in such a town as Butte.

But he had a strong reliance in her pride, her strength of purpose, and the spirit and courage which she had exhibited from a child.

Last night he had painfully contrasted his position with hers; but to-day he almost wished that she might be there with him. He stepped forward briskly, finding a real enjoyment in the keen and frosty air.

At a little distance from Stephen Boreman's ranch he halted and glanced at the snow at the side of the trail.

"About here," he said, "I would be lying now, frozen stiff, if I had not happened to see the light across the creek and made my way to that good fellow's ranch."

The thought that he was alive and well after that perilous experience, gave him fresh strength and courage, and he pushed forward at a rate of speed of which he would not have believed himself capable the day before.

The dry snow crunched under his tread, and he put mile after mile behind him in his steady and determined tramp.

About the middle of the afternoon he stopped at the mouth of White Wolf Canyon to eat a portion of the food with which Stephen Boreman had provided him, and to consider the question of a stopping-place for the night.

There was a place not far away—partly ranch and partly tavern—the location and distance of which he knew, and he believed that he could make a short cut to it by passing through White Wolf Canyon, otherwise known as Indian Bill's Hole.

No trail had been broken through the canyon, but the crusted snow would easily bear his weight, and he believed that he would be able to reach Sim Ackwell's by nightfall.

So he left the trail, and struck boldly across to the canyon.

It was in the nature of a valley, rather than a true canyon, being a pass which trended upward, with high hills on either side.

At that season it was mainly a receptacle for snow, which had drifted there in such vast quantities that spring would have hard work to get rid of it.

Dick Herries could not avoid such a sense of insecurity as made him wish that he had not chosen that route.

If the crust of the snow should give way under his feet, there was no telling to what a depth he might drop.

He might find himself buried beyond the possibility of extricating himself; but the crust bore him steadily and firmly until he forgot that danger, and the only thing that troubled him was the difficulty of the ascent.

It was much steeper than he had supposed it would be, and the slippery surface of the snow made it hard work for him to get ahead. His progress, therefore, was unpleasantly slow, to say nothing of the danger of breaking through the crust.

It was near sunset when he reached the crest of the pass, and there was dismay in the reflection that a considerable distance still separated him from Ackwell's.

But the greater part of the remaining journey would be down-hill, and that would be comparatively easy.

Besides, the night promised to be clear and bright, and he need not fear losing his way in the darkness.

He was about to take a fresh start down-hill, when a strange noise fell upon his astonished ears. It sounded like the cry of some human being in distress. It was a moaning, wailing cry, as if it might have been uttered by a child, and was quite clear and distinct, though it had a muffled and distant sound.

He could not imagine how such a cry could come from anything but a human being, unless there might be a wildcat about.

He looked over the crusted snow, and among the snow-covered trees that lined the sides of the canyon, but saw no indication of the presence of a living creature.

Again he was about to move onward, when he heard the cry again, a little clearer than before.

Surely there *must* be some person near him—some person in pain or trouble.

Again he looked about carefully and closely, but saw nothing that could account for the cry. Then he heard another noise, louder and more startling than the cry.

It was the sound of a man's voice—plainly and surely that—a voice that was raised in angry or threatening tones.

The sound was muffled and indistinct, as the cry had been, and he could not catch a spoken word; but it was beyond question a man's voice.

What could it be, and where had it come from?

It sounded as if it might have come from the depths of the snow beneath him; but was that possible?

There was nothing to show that anybody had fallen in, and the crust of the snow was everywhere undisturbed.

How could human beings be buried under there, and yet be living?

Dick Herries could not understand it at all. He took a few steps forward, but saw nothing that could throw any light upon the mystery.

In his amazement and perplexity, he stamped upon the crusted snow.

Suddenly it gave way beneath him, and he dropped into the drift!

CHAPTER IX.

DROPPING INTO A GOOD THING.

WHAT could the drop into the drift mean but death, certain, if not speedy?

When Dick Herries went down there, he had no expectation of seeing daylight again.

He fell so far that there could be no hope of emerging from the white and cold mass that surrounded him.

He might be smothered, or he might freeze; but in either event he must slowly perish, with no chance to help himself.

Yet it was strange to note the fact that so little snow fell with him.

Even stranger was it that he alighted on hard ground, and that he was clear of snow except the little he had brought down with him.

He looked about him, and saw distinctly, in spite of the absence of daylight, that he was in a tunnel about three feet wide, cleanly cut through the drifted and packed snow.

Overhead was a roof of snow, and he had happened to be directly above the tunnel when he stamped his foot and broke through the crust.

Of course it was the work of human hands, and he would soon know where the noises had come from and what they meant.

Again he heard that wailing cry, clearly enough this time, and it was quickly followed by the heavy voice that he had heard once before.

This time, too, the spoken words reached his ears, and he knew what was said.

The heavy voice was raised in threatening tones, and this is what Dick Herries heard:

"I've fooled with you long enough, and I mean to make an end of you now."

The wailing tones struck in again, evidently in an entreaty for mercy, though the words could not be distinguished.

Dick Herries ran along the tunnel in the direction of the sounds.

A few steps brought him to a low cabin, buried in the snow, scarcely any of it but the door being visible.

The door was open, and the interior was lighted by a fire.

As Dick Herries ran up, he saw a man bending over another who seemed to be lying on a low bed or couch.

This time the plaintive wail was almost a shriek.

"Don't kill me, Boggs! Take all I've got. I will make everything over to you. But for mercy's sake let me live!"

A savage imprecation followed this appeal, and the man who was standing stooped as if with deadly intent.

There was a faint struggle, and Dick Herries rushed in.

He instantly seized the aggressor, and violently pulled him away from his victim.

The man seemed at first almost paralyzed by surprise and consternation, but he quickly recovered himself, and fiercely attacked the stranger whose interference had robbed him of his prey.

His face was purple with passion, and his eyes blazed like those of a wild beast.

In his right hand he held a hunting-knife, and his savage attack showed that his intent was murderous.

Instead of one victim, there were two, but the second one was well able to take care of himself.

He was also prepared for the onset.

As he entered the cabin he had drawn and cocked his revolver; but he hesitated to use it with deadly effect.

He backed away from the assault of the knife, using cautionary words, and endeavoring to calm the fury of his antagonist, but he might as well have read the gospel of peace to a wildcat, for the murderer, balked of his helpless victim, was wild with rage.

He dashed at the intruder, slashing fiercely

and without judgment, but with deadly purpose.

Then the revolver cracked, and the encounter was ended.

The man who wielded the knife fell backward on the floor of the cabin, shot through the brain.

As he was doubtless dead when he touched the floor, he was counted out of the subsequent proceedings.

Dick Herries turned his attention to the man on the bed, who had sunk into a swoon, the effect of weakness and fright; but the prompt attention of his rescuer speedily brought him to his senses. He opened his eyes, and his wan countenance lighted up at the sight of the strange face.

"Where is he?" he whispered.

"Dead," answered Dick Herries.

"He is dead, and I am yet alive. It is so strange. You saved me from him, and I am very thankful. I have been nearly dead here; but I did not want to die, and he was going to kill me."

"Keep quiet," ordered Herries. "Don't try to talk just yet, and I will do my best to straighten up things here."

He perceived that the man was weak and emaciated, and there could be no doubt that he was in need of nourishment.

Regardless of the dead body on the floor, Dick Herries searched the cabin for provisions, of which he found a sufficient store.

He speedily prepared as good a meal as the circumstances would allow, and set it before the invalid, who ate as ravenously as a starved dog.

"I was famished," he said, when he had satisfied his fierce craving. "That man has been starving me for some time; but I failed to die soon enough to suit him, and he concluded to kill me."

"Who is he?" inquired Herries.

"My partner, Jim Boggs. I will tell you all about it after a while, if you will only get him away from here, or put him out of sight somehow."

Dick Herries accomplished this unpleasant task with as little delay as possible. He dug a hole in the snow outside, dragged thither the body of Jim Boggs, and covered it up; then he returned to the cabin, built up the fire, and listened to the story of Jim Boggs's partner.

"My name," said the invalid, "is Angus Dameron, and I have told you my partner's name. We have been mining and prospecting together for nearly two years, and have saved up quite a decent pile."

"We did more than that. Just at the close of the open season we struck a rich find. We could not touch it then, as the snow had begun to fall, and work was out of the question; so we decided to locate here until spring, when we would develop the find and scoop in a fortune."

"We built this cabin, and stored it with provisions, and settled down to make ourselves comfortable; but the winter has been the worst I ever experienced, and it proved to be too much for us. We were snowed in here in this canyon, and the drifts piled down upon us and buried our cabin out of sight."

"That did not bother us much, as we tunneled out to our woodpile, and there was nothing else that we needed."

"So we determined to stay here, and to keep our pile and our secret, at least until we should be thawed out."

"Perhaps it was the solitude that worked on us then, or perhaps it was the thought of being buried under the snow, or perhaps we had got to be too much for ourselves."

"Anyhow, we both went wrong, but in different ways. I was taken sick, and it is my opinion, my friend, that Jim Boggs went crazy. He nursed me, and took right good care of me for a while, and it was not until I was beginning to mend that he got terribly queer."

"Then he would sit around and talk about my dying, and would wonder where and how he was going to bury me, and would speak of what he meant to do with the pile and how he would work the claim, and now and then would say that after all it might be cheaper and easier and better every way to put me out of my misery."

"That sort of thing, as you may suppose, didn't tend to make me get better very fast."

"At last he began to starve me—just when I was on the mend, too, and needed food badly. I was too weak to help myself, and was so deathly afraid of him that I didn't dare to try, except when he went out for wood or something of the sort, and then I would pick up a bit."

"He used to keep walking the floor, too, muttering to himself, and going on at such a rate that I was afraid I would soon be as crazy as I believed him to be."

"What I managed to pick up was just enough to keep me alive, though you may bet high that I didn't get a bit fat or strong; but he caught me at it to-day, and said that he was going to put a stop to that sort of thing and make an end of me."

"He meant to do the job, too, and would have done it, if you hadn't dropped in and saved me. I don't know that I ought to blame him, as he was crazy; but I can't help feeling that it was a mighty close call for me."

"There was nothing to do with him but to kill him," remarked Dick Herries. "I tried to keep him off and calm him down; but it was his life or mine, and he would have settled you after he had got through with me."

"I know that, and it was the biggest kind of a streak of luck for me that you happened to drop in. How did you do it?"

Herries explained the manner of his arrival, and gave a brief account of himself.

"Now that you are here," said Angus Dameron, "I hope you will stay here and see me through. You have saved my life, and I want to prove to you that it was a paying job. You shall step into Jim Boggs's place, if you will, and take his share of the pile and the secret. When I get strong enough we will dig out of here, and it won't be long before you will see that you have dropped into a good thing."

Dick Herries began to believe that he had dropped into a very good thing, and he readily consented to stay there and take care of Angus Dameron.

CHAPTER X.

A BLOW FROM BIRKETT.

SILVER SAM's arrangement for the care and comfort of Kate Herries worked admirably. They were few and simple, but quite to the purpose, and seemed to serve her needs sufficiently.

She went to and from the Concert Hall at night, secure in the belief that she was well watched and guarded.

The first attempt to molest her was met and checked in such a summary manner by Muggs, of Muggsville, that it was nearly a week before the incautious molester was able to leave his bed.

Andrew Birkett made no further move toward executing any of his schemes concerning her.

Perhaps he had concluded that the game was a dangerous one, and was biding his time and waiting for a better chance.

Perhaps he may have been deterred by a little personal explanation on the part of Sam Slevin.

That individual met him in a Butte saloon shortly after the encounter that had been described, and mildly wanted to know whether Mr. Birkett thought he had any account which he wanted to settle with him.

"I don't know you, and don't want to have anything to do with you," answered the prominent citizen.

This was satisfactory as far as it went; but Slevin observed that he had a little settlement to make on his own account.

"I want to know," he said, "why you made Dick Herries believe that I was responsible for his being driven out of camp with the others?"

"Who told you that I did that?" demanded Birkett.

"Dick Herries's daughter."

"And who told her?"

"Dick Herries himself."

"Mighty fine authority. If you want to believe anything of the kind, on that sort of evidence, just go ahead and believe it. I have enough business to attend to without bothering my head with such stuff."

"Very well, Mr. Birkett. If that sort of a get off pleases you, you are welcome to put it so; but I want to say that if any man did tell Dick Herries that I had anything to do with the notice to quit, that man was a liar and a sneak. I suppose you remember something that happened the other night, and I want to say, while I am about it, that if that game is played again, or any game of the sort, somebody will get hurt."

"And I tell you," angrily retorted Birkett, "that anybody who meddles with my affairs will be sure to get hurt. And I say, too, that if you did help to run off poor Dick Herries, a man with half an eye can see the reason why you did it."

There was an insult implied in this remark, but Sam Slevin took no notice of it. Having accomplished his purpose of saying his say and speaking his word of warning, he went about his business.

That business took him away from Butte for a little while, and when he returned he had a good report for Kate Herries concerning her father.

He was able to assure her that Dick Herries was probably alive and safe, though he could not say whether he had gone.

Though he did not admit as much to Kate, Sam Slevin's expedition in search of her father had been attended with a little difficulty and unpleasantness.

Among other places he stopped at Stephen Boreman's ranch.

When he inquired there concerning the exile, he was met by distrust and suspicion.

"Who are you, and what do you want of Dick Herries?" demanded the ranchman.

"My name is Sam Slevin, and I want to find him," answered the inquirer.

"The blazes you do! You're a sweet-scented son of a gun to come around here purtendin' to want to find Dick Herries, arter you'd driven him out of Butte, and come within a hair's breadth of killin' him!"

The ranchman was requested to explain his

meaning more clearly, and it appeared that Dick Herries had told him the same story that he had told his daughter.

Sam Slevin simply produced a letter, and asked Stephen Boreman to read it. It was directed to Dick Herries, and was signed by his daughter.

Among other matters it contained this paragraph:

"Mr. Slevin has been very kind to me, while Andrew Birkett has proved to be an enemy, and I am sure, dear father, that you were greatly mistaken when you said that Mr. Slevin had anything to do with your being sent away from here. He is going to look for you, and if he finds you I trust you will accept him as a true friend, just as I have done."

That looks all straight and square, Mr. Slevin," observed the ranchman when he had spelled out the writing. "Seem like there must have been a big lie out somewhere."

"A big and mean lie," responded Sam.

"And so, as this letter seems to be from Dick Herries's daughter, and as she certifies you as being all right, I will tell you what I know about him, though it ain't much."

Stephen Boreman related the particulars of Dick Herries's arrival and stay at his ranch, and gave full details of everything that occurred up to the departure of the exile.

"That's all there is to tell," he said in conclusion, "except that he was alive and safe when he left here, and he is likely to be alive and safe now, wherever he is."

Sam was of the same opinion, and judged that it would not be worth while for him to pursue his investigation any further.

He returned to Butte, and carried this cheering information to Kate Herries, who was deeply grateful to him for his kindness, and the trouble he had taken.

She believed with Slevin that her father was then alive and safe, and her knowledge of what he had said and done at Boreman's ranch, especially with regard to his whisky-flask, was a great consolation to her.

"That shows that his head is right, now," said she, "and I have no longer any fear for him. He never let liquor get the better of him until lately, but he has not seemed to be in his right mind since—since mother went away. But, I do believe that he will go straight now, and he told me when we parted that perhaps his leaving Butte would be the best thing that could happen to him."

"If he is as solid as Stephen Boreman supposed him to be," answered Slevin, "there is no need to worry about him any more, and your safety is the only thing to look after."

"There is nothing to fear about me, Mr. Slevin. I am safe and quite comfortable, thanks to your great kindness."

It was his own safety that Sam Slevin needed to look after; but he did not know that, and had no reason to suspect any special danger. He was so accustomed to expecting and encountering danger, that he took little thought of anything of that kind.

It was one of his favorite sayings that it is not worth while to jump over a fence before you get to it; but it would have been well for him if he could have measured the extent of Andrew Birkett's animosity, and could have got an inkling of the intentions of that prominent citizen toward him.

Outside of the affair of Kate Herries, it was not to be supposed that Birkett would have set her father against him unless there had been some special cause of enmity.

An outside observer would have been apt to imagine that the enmity must be in some way connected with those two.

But Sam harbored none of those suppositions, and thought of Andrew Birkett only with the view of shielding Kate Herries from his possible schemes.

One night he met that prominent citizen, or was met by him, as it was evident that the time and place of the meeting were chosen by Birkett.

The hour was after midnight, and the place was a lonely spot away from the glare of the still lighted saloons.

"I have been looking for you, Mr. Meddlesome," said Birkett, as he suddenly confronted the man from Central City.

"It is always easy to find me," responded Slevin, provokingly cool.

"I pick my chances, though. I mean to settle with you now, and to settle with you for keeps."

There was something strikingly suspicious about this, and a much less alert man than Sam Slevin could not have failed to notice the confident tone and the general style of the performance.

Sam also could not help perceiving that the hand of the man who met him was in his overcoat pocket—a clear indication of contemplated pistol practice.

Therefore he stood on his guard—not so much against Birkett, as against whoever might be behind him.

"How many of you are there?" he quietly inquired.

The answer was doubtless intended to be a shot.

But it did not come quick enough.

A judicious kick of Sam's left foot knocked the revolver out of his hand as soon as it was drawn from the overcoat pocket, and at the same time temporarily disabled the hand.

The pistol flew away a little distance, and dropped harmlessly, while Birkett shook his hand as if it hurt him, and no doubt it did.

Then came the real attack.

Sudden it was, but not unexpected by Slevin. Backing against the wall of a house, he discharged his revolver rapidly at the foes who rushed at him from all quarters.

His aim was as true as it was quick; but they were too many for him.

They fired as they advanced upon him, and pistol-shots made the night lively for a few minutes.

"Pour it into him, boys!" shouted Birkett. "Kill him while you've got him!"

If his gang of assassins failed to obey this order, it was not for lack of effort.

Though Slevin's bullets counted among them, theirs told upon him as well.

Struck in the right arm, and then in the side, he first dropped his pistol, and then his body dropped on the wooden sidewalk.

"Finish him, boys!" cried Birkett, and the gang closed in upon their helpless victim; but, into the midst of them, as if propelled by a catapult, shot the burly form of Muggs, of Muggsville.

He was armed with a club, and laid about him so vigorously that he demoralized Silver Sam's assailants, and before they could rally to meet this attack, another aggressive element sailed into the scene.

It was Kate Herries, who had perceived the rush of Muggs of Muggsville, and had hastened to the assistance of her body-guard.

She carried a revolver, with which she at least made a great noise, at the same time calling loudly for help.

But the shots and shouts had already attracted a number of men who came running forward, and Birkett and his gang hastened to make themselves scarce.

Sam Slevin, badly wounded, was taken to his room and tenderly cared for.

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS JOURNEY.

WHILE Sam Slevin was confined to his bed by his wounds, but comfortably situated and well cared for, events were transpiring in Butte and elsewhere, which might, if he had been informed of them, have given him an inkling of the cause of Birkett's hostility to him.

That prominent citizen, in the mean time, was flourishing like a green bay tree, and had been in no wise called to an account for his lawless and dastardly attack upon the man from Central City.

No person seemed to be disposed to take the matter up, and justice then and there was not vigilant enough to investigate a street fight of its own accord.

The dead were quietly buried, and the wounded were cared for by their friends, and that ended the affair as far as the public were concerned.

At an early hour in the morning, before anybody was astir to notice his departure or make inquiries concerning it, a man left Butte in a somewhat singular manner.

This man was Joshua Cattermole, a particular friend of Andrew Birkett's who was on hand to wish him good luck as he started, and to give him a word of instruction.

"Tell Bet that all she's got to do is to keep things safe and straight," said Birkett "and that I will come out there as soon as the spring opens."

"All right, gov'nor," growled Cattermole; "I don't like the job a bit, but the pay is good, and I will do the best I can with it."

He might well grumble and growl, as the task before him was both difficult and dangerous.

The winter had not begun to break, and he must traverse many miles of mountain range and valley and canyon, where the snow lay heavily everywhere and in some places the drifts were tremendous.

Besides the dangers of the snow in position, he must encounter the perils of avalanches, which any warm and sunny day might bring down upon him, one of which might sweep him and his belongings into eternity as easily as a leaf is carried away by a torrent.

He was well prepared and fitted, as far as human forethought could go, for such a journey.

His clothing was heavy and warm, and his legs were well wrapped, and his boots and mittens and fur cap were almost sufficient for the rigors of an Arctic winter.

Besides his rifle and revolver and knife, he carried a pair of snow-shoes for use on the surface of the crusted snow.

The troublesome part of his outfit was a sled which he was to drag.

It was not a sled as that article is usually understood, being more like an exaggerated toboggan.

It was, in fact, a frame of thin boards, curved upward at the forward end, broad and flat

otherwise, so as to slide over the snow without breaking through.

On this were securely strapped sacks of flour and meat and other provisions and miscellanies, the whole closely covered with a waterproof cloth.

The load would have been much too heavy for a man to carry on his back; but the sledding, under ordinary circumstances, was not a formidable undertaking.

Thus equipped, and thus loaded and hampered, Josh Cattermole set out from Butte in the gray of the morning.

He kept to the road only a little distance, and then strapped on his snow-shoes, mounted the white waste, and struck off into the hills.

His journey was fully as toilsome as he could have expected it to be, and he had not exaggerated its perils in the least.

It was seldom that his sled broke through the crust of the snow, and then it was easily extricated, but the labor connected with it was enough to wear out a mule.

When it came to pulling the load up slopes so heavy that they might almost be called precipitous, there was no joke about the business.

More than once he could only get forward by taking a turn around a tree, working the sled up to it, and then carrying his rope on to another tree, and thus repeating the operation until he reached the summit of the acclivity.

When it came to descending such slopes, though the labor was less, the other difficulties were something fearful.

In order to prevent the sled from running away from him, he was obliged to mount it and secure such control as he could get by steering.

Coasting is a pleasant and exciting pastime under proper conditions and safeguards; but it becomes decidedly too exciting on a mountain-side, where trees and rocks and other obstructions are to be avoided or encountered.

More than once Josh Cattermole was obliged to reverse the process by which he had ascended, and to let his sled down carefully from tree to tree.

Thus his progress was slowly painful and painfully slow.

But he had the satisfaction of feeding and sleeping well, in spite of all inclemencies.

Though he was seldom able to build a fire, he had a small oil-stove that served him for cooking purposes, and at night he made a bed of evergreen boughs, wrapped himself well in his blankets, and managed to sleep with a fair degree of comfort.

In the daytime, when the sun was beginning to melt the surface of the snow, he looked about with anxiety, if not with fear and trembling, as he journeyed through canyons or at the base of mountain ranges, and actually tried to tread softly, as if dreading that the least movement might start the overhanging masses of snow and send them down to overwhelm him.

More than one snow-slide came near him; but he passed unharmed through all the dangers that beset him, and reached his destination near the close of the fourth day after leaving Butte.

Then he saw the first sign of human life that he had encountered during his journey.

Near the mouth of a canyon, and close to the foot of a mountainous height, the top of a log cabin was visible above the waste of snow, and smoke wreaths curling upward proved that it was inhabited.

The cabin, though small, was very stoutly built, and its rear was set directly against the hill, its roof sloping sharply down to the front, as if to allow any masses of snow that might come from above to slide over it and pass down into the valley.

A small space was cleared off in front of the cabin, and a path had been dug to a clump of trees near by, evidently for the purpose of getting firewood.

Josh Cattermole dragged his sled up to the summit of the snow pile, and hailed the cabin.

To attempt to come upon the occupants of such an establishment unawares might provoke a hasty dose of lead.

The door was cautiously opened, and a woman's head was thrust out.

CHAPTER XII.

BET RAWSON'S CHARGE.

THE woman who answered Josh Cattermole's hail was not a beautiful object.

Her appearance, in fact, might better be described as "striking."

She was neither young nor old, but probably looked older than she really was.

This may have been owing to her height, as she was unusually tall, to the coarse and uncommonly cotton gown she wore, and to her frowzy hair, which indicated an aversion to the comb.

But her dark eyes were large and expressive, and her features were so good that we might be inclined to say that she would be a handsome woman if she were "fixed up."

Her form as well as her stature spoke of physical strength, and her face gave token of courage and resolution that could make her strength available.

"Who in — is that?" she profanely and impolitely demanded.

"It's me, Josh Cattermole," answered the traveler, with a reckless disregard of the rules of grammar.

"You don't say! At last! If you'd waited much longer, you wouldn't have been needed at all. But it's better late than never, I reckon."

"I've brought enough now, Miss Bet, to last you a while; but I don't see how I am going to get it down there."

"Want some help, do you? Just like you ornary men-folks. Well, I'll have to lend you a hand."

With the woman's assistance Cattermole unloaded his sled and passed the various articles down into the clear space.

"You did a good job of keeping away," observed the woman, as she helped him carry the goods into the cabin.

"Did you ever know such a winter before?" replied Cattermole. "It was as much as my life was worth to start out when I did."

"There's lives here that's worth more than yours, and we shouldn't have been left here unless we were to be cared for. I want you to tell Andrew Birkett from me that Bet Rawson won't go through the like of this again, for him or any other man. Let him know that I am alive and don't mean to stand any nonsense."

"I reckon he knows that well enough, Miss Bet. He told me to tell you that he will come out here as soon as spring opens."

"He had better."

Bet Rawson busied herself in stowing the goods away in the cabin, while Josh Cattermole removed his wrappings and seated himself near the fire.

The interior of the cabin differed in one noteworthy particular from other habitations of its class.

It was divided into two rooms by a double partition of stout planking, in which there was a door that was both locked and bolted.

The room which Josh Cattermole and Bet Rawson had entered was much the larger of the two, and it contained a fireplace in which a big fire was blazing.

It was pretty well filled with articles of necessity and comfort, to which the contents of Josh Cattermole's sled added an air of plenty.

The woman, when she had finished taking care of the provender, posted herself near the fire, and began her preparations for supper.

"How is she?" asked Cattermole, in a subdued tone, pointing with his thumb toward the partition.

"About the same," answered Bet. "A little thinner, maybe, and a good deal more mopish-looking as if she never expected to get anything more out of this world or the next. I am sometimes afraid that she will go crazy before the job is finished."

"That would be bad; but she won't get so far, I hope. All the gov'nor wants of her is to sign her name and a little of that sort of thing."

"Well, Josh, I don't know. She seems to have settled down to whatever must be; but it don't look well to see her so stupid and melancholy-like, and I think Andy had better hurry up, as she might take a notion to drop off the hooks if this thing goes on much longer."

"He is hurrying up, Miss Bet, and is doing all he can; but this hard winter has knocked 'most everything in the head. You can't think how bad we've been snowed up there in Butte. As soon as the spring fairly opens he means to come out here, as I told you, and then he expects to straighten the thing up, and will give you your share of the money."

"He had better," significantly remarked Bet Rawson. "Do you want to see her, Josh?"

"Not I," answered the emissary. "Things are sorrowful enough these days without going through anything of that sort."

To pass the time, and to entertain his companion, he gave a detailed account of his journey from Butte, and the toils and perils of the trip were in no respect lessened in his recital of them.

He so worked upon the feelings of Bet Rawson that she made him a drink which was hot and strong enough, as Josh said, to bore a hole in a quartz rock, and she took special pains to make his supper palatable to him.

When they had finished their supper the woman took a portion into the other room, unlocking the door and carefully closing it behind her.

There was a murmur of voices on the other side of the partition, to which Josh Cattermole listened eagerly; but he could make nothing of it.

"What does she say?" he asked, when Bet Rawson had come out and locked the door.

"Nothin' much. She knew that somebody had come here, and wanted to know who it was and what for."

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her that you had come and brought a load of provisions."

"What else did she say?"

"Only stuff and nonsense—wanting to know about her folks, and to get out and go home, and that sort of thing."

"What do you tell her when she goes on that way?"

"I tell her to keep quiet and wait till spring."

"It will be fixed then, Miss Bet, I reckon, and the gov'nor will let her go fast enough when the time comes."

"If death don't turn her loose before that time."

Josh Cattermole was made comfortable on a spread-down before the fire, and awoke in the morning greatly refreshed by his sound sleep.

He felt so well after his dram and a good breakfast, that he proposed to Bet Rawson that he should go out and cut wood to replenish her woodpile.

"I mean to take a day's rest before I start back," said he, "and may as well put in my time that way."

"There ain't much rest in cutting wood," she replied, "and I can keep the fires going as well as any man; but you may peck about a little if you have a notion to."

Cattermole declared that he was in the habit of resting himself, Yankee fashion, by changing works, and he proceeded to put in a good morning's work at cutting wood and carrying it to the cabin.

When he had eaten a hearty dinner and enjoyed his smoke, he called Bet Rawson outside to confer with her concerning a matter that troubled his mind.

The morning had been sunny and unusually warm, and after noon the day was almost springlike.

The surface of the snow was melting everywhere, and little rivulets were trickling down the valley from about the cabin.

"Did you ever see a snowslide, Miss Bet?" inquired Andrew Birkett's emissary.

"More than one of them. The worst I ever saw was down in Red Cottonwood Canyon."

"Big thing, was it? Some of them are mighty big. Look up there, now, and tell me what you think would happen if the snow on that mountain-side should take a notion to slip down here."

"If you think that I haven't got sense enough to calculate against that sort of thing," she answered, "you don't know Bet Rawson yet. The cabin was set here and built this way to fend off a slide. If the snow drops, it will pass on over this shebang, and slide down into the bottom of the valley."

"Perhaps it will, if you have luck. The avalanche, as some people call 'em, may do that thing, if it don't sag in the middle, as they are mighty apt to. I've known 'em to take a straight chute down a mountain-side, carrying rocks and trees and everything before 'em, and leaving a deep track as smooth as a log-slide. If it should happen to come in that style, this cabin would take the suddenest kind of a leaving."

"We must take our chances, Josh Cattermole. We are here and can't get away, and I don't know but one place is about as safe as another."

"Trust to luck, hey? Well, that's a good thing to do when you can't do anything else. You may be all right, the way the shebang is pitched, unless the durned slide sags."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MOUNTAIN AVALANCHE.

JOSH CATTERMOLE put away the ax that he had taken from the cabin, and started down the path that led to the grove.

"Things look kinder skittish," he remarked; "but I reckon I may as well bring up the rest of the wood I cut."

He looked up at the mountain side again and again as he went, and walked as if he were treading on eggs.

Hardly had he reached the timber when he heard a rumbling noise, like the sound of not very distant thunder, that seemed to come from just over his head.

He knew at once that a snow-slide had begun, but could not stop to inquire where it started or what its extent might be.

He turned quickly, and ran at the top of his speed toward the cabin.

Not that he would be any safer there, or that he could expect to be of any service to anybody there, but because there was no way of retreat open but the path that led to the cabin.

Down the mountain-side, just opposite to the place where he had been cutting wood, slid the mass of snow, starting from the very summit, increasing as it came, and swiftly gathering speed and momentum as well as size.

The rumble had deepened to a roar, and the noise of the descending avalanche was almost deafening.

Josh Cattermole felt the ground tremble under his feet, and his heart trembled with it.

But he speedily knew that he was safe, at least for the present.

The rush and roar passed behind him, and clouds of snow flew about him and enveloped him; but he was not swept away, and silence succeeded the tumult of the avalanche.

He stopped then, quite out of breath, and turned and looked at the scene of destruction.

The grove had vanished.

"It is a good thing that I didn't leave the ax there," he muttered.

From the summit of the mountain down to and past the place where the grove had been, was the track of the avalanche—dark, straight and smooth, as if a gigantic steam plow, with an immense scraper attachment, had suddenly dug a broad trench straight down the declivity.

Rocks, trees, and everything in the path of the descending snow, had been uprooted and carried away with it, leaving not a trace behind.

Down in the valley, where the slide finally came to a stop, was a vast heap of snow, mingled with the debris of the mountain-side.

The avalanche had descended at a considerable distance from the cabin, behind and above which the snow had as yet shown no signs of starting.

But the sun was still shining, and the day was at its warmest, and at any moment and from any quarter a similar snow-slide might be expected.

The snow might remain on the sides and summits of the mountains until the sunshine and the rains melted it away by degrees, or it might suddenly slip and spread devastation in its path.

There was no calculating on it.

All it needed was a start, and there was no telling how soon the start might be given.

When Josh Cattermole reached the cabin, Bet Rawson was standing there, just as he had left her.

She seemed to be quite cool and unconcerned, and was looking up at the snow-covered heights behind the cabin as calmly as if no special danger was to be apprehended.

"You had a narrow escape down there, Josh," she mildly remarked.

"I did that, Miss Bet, and I don't hanker after any more such close calls. Your wood patch has kinder floated off."

"Yes, but there's plenty of timber about. I am glad that you are safe, Josh."

"Well, yaas; but I wish I could be sure that I am safe. Things look skittish enough yet, and the next time the snow slides it may drop on us."

"Lightning never strikes twice in the same place, Josh."

"It don't, hey? I wouldn't advise you to bet heavy on that. I don't a bit like the looks of the snow up there."

As he spoke he was gazing upward at the mountain-side.

His sight was keen, and he saw something, or fancied that he saw it, that made him start.

"I think I see a break up yonder," he said. "Look, Miss Bet! ain't there something like a black line in the snow yonder? Yes, by thunder! There she starts!"

Bet Rawson did not seem to be a bit frightened, but was instant in action.

"I will get her out," she said, and started into the cabin.

The rumble had already begun, and the motion of the mass of snow could plainly be seen as it started downward.

Josh Cattermole did not start to run in any direction, and made no effort whatever to escape.

He stood out in front of the cabin, and there was more curiosity than fear in his look as he gazed upward at the approaching avalanche.

"I wonder," he quietly remarked, "if the durned thing will sag."

It was a queer remark to make, in the face of death, with ever so many tons of snow, to say nothing of rocks and trees, rushing down upon him at frightful speed; but he really seemed to think that the avalanche might pass harmlessly over the cabin, unless it should happen to be heaviest in the middle.

The rumble had increased to a roar, and it looked as if the whole mountain-side was coming down at once, when Bet Rawson reappeared at the door of the cabin.

At her side was a woman of matronly appearance, but not at all stout in build.

She was, indeed, rather attenuated, and the most noteworthy thing about her features was their look of extreme melancholy and the startled gaze of her large dark eyes.

Cattermole could give her but one quick glance, as the avalanche was upon them.

The roar was deafening, and the sight, terrific in its grandeur, was enough to shatter the strongest nerves.

Instinctively he rushed forward, and crouched against the wall of the cabin, as if that could possibly afford him any protection from the irresistible onslaught of the moving mass.

The next instant the air was filled with flying snow, mingled with debris of the mountain-side and fragments of the board roofing and the stick chimney.

The earth trembled, and the cabin shook as if seized by an ague.

But it was all over in a moment, and the helpless spectators were safe.

There stood the cabin, and they could see the sun shining in the clear sky.

The cleared space in front of the cabin was nearly filled with snow; but the white waste directly beyond it was comparatively untouched.

At each side, however, the tracks of the ava-

lanche were plainly visible where it had plowed its way in two sections down to the bottom of the valley.

Josh Cattermole stepped forward, and looked back over the roof at the mountain-side.

"I was right, then," said Bet Rawson, speaking as quietly as if an avalanche were an everyday occurrence.

"I was right, then, and the shanty did shed the slide."

"Not much," answered the emissary. "It got no chance to shed it. The slide shed itself. The durned thing didn't sag, as I was afraid it would, but split in the middle, and passed by on each side of us. If that ain't luck, you may kick me all the way back to Butte."

The woman at Bet Rawson's side spoke up in feeble but eager tones.

"You have come from Butte, and you bring news from there. I beg you to tell me what I am dying to know. How are—"

"All right, mum," quickly interposed Cattermole. "Everybody is well, and everything is as right as it can be. All you've got to do is to keep quiet and wait awhile. That's all I know, and all you can get out of me."

Bet Rawson quietly but forcibly led the woman away, in spite of her feeble protests, and locked her up in her room again.

Josh Cattermole assisted in repairing the little damage that had been done to the cabin, and the next morning he set out to return to Butte, skimming swiftly along on his snow-shoes, and giving mountain-sides as wide a berth as possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MISSING HEIRESS.

WHEN Andrew Birkett's emissary got back to Butte, he hastened to give an account of his journey to his employer.

He found Birkett in a comfortable and almost luxurious apartment, looking over papers, filing letters, and generally considering and arranging his business affairs.

"That was a big streak of luck," he said, when Cattermole had related rather graphically the episode of the avalanche.

"It was bigger luck than could have been hoped for, though I must confess that I had never calculated the chances of that kind of thing. How did the slide happen to split?"

Josh Cattermole explained that a friendly and immovable point of rock on the mountain-side had interposed just at the right place to divide the avalanche in two sections and change the course of each sufficiently to save the cabin by a close shave.

"It was immense luck," said Birkett. "If that slide had got in its work as it meant to, it would have swept away the most promising speculation I have struck for years, to say nothing of making an end of you and Bet. How does the old girl seem to stand the pressure, Josh?"

"Like a rock. She's tough as quartz, as you well know. But she told me, gov'nor, and her eyes snapped as she said it, to tell you that she is alive, and that she don't mean to stand any nonsense."

"Who wants her to stand any nonsense? Nobody wants to give her any, that I know of. She shall get away from there after a while, and then she will have an easy time."

"Reckon she wants more than that, gov'nor."

"What does she want?"

"She wants you."

"I don't bother about what she wants. She will get what I choose to give her. I mean to go out there as soon as the weather will let me, and then I will fix up that matter of business, and will give her the share of the money that I promised her."

"She says that you had better."

"Getting sassy again, is she? I hope she won't have one of her tough old tantrums until this thing is settled."

"What is the prospect, gov'nor?"

"Good enough. There don't seem to be anything in the way but what I can pass through or climb over. I have just got another letter from that lawyer in Kansas City, Moses Atterbury."

"What does he say now?"

"About what I wanted him to say. It is all satisfactory as far as it has gone. I said when I first wrote to him, you know, that I thought I could find the woman he wanted, and in my second letter I told him that I was pretty sure of it, and believed that I could lay hands on her at any time. Reckon I can do that easy enough, Josh, since that snow-slide failed to sweep her away."

"She is safe enough, gov'nor, if she is the right woman."

"I am as sure of that as I am sure that I am Andrew Birkett."

"Is that such a dead sure thing?"

"Don't rake up any bygones, Josh. It is quite enough to take care of the present time. I also asked Moses Atterbury what sort of identification would be needed, what the property amounted to, and whether it would suit him if I should get the power of attorney from her to go East and settle up the business."

"What did he say to that?"

"He told me that the property would amount to more than fifty thousand dollars, but he couldn't say how much, as it was rapidly rising in value. As for identification, the affidavits of people who knew her would be enough, and I can easy fix that. A power of attorney from her, he said, would do to settle up the business with. Anyhow, he hoped that he would not be obliged to come out here to attend to it, and that's where I've got him."

"It does seem to be nigh as straight as a line, gov'nor, and I'm keen to bet that the scheme will work."

"There is one other point, Josh, and it is the only thing that worries me. Moses Atterbury says that before he wrote to me, he had sent out to Central City to a man named Sam Slevin—"

"The thunder!" interjected Cattermole.

"The Silver Prince, you know—who had been highly recommended to him as a detective. He had given that fellow a description of the woman with her history as far as he knew it, and had instructed him to find her if possible, and he supposed that Slevin was looking for her."

"That is a point that may make trouble, gov'nor, and I reckon it won't do to lose any time in settling up the business."

The two conspirators might have got a little more light upon the point that might make trouble, if they could have been in two places in Butte at the same time.

While Andrew Birkett was explaining the situation to Josh Cattermole, Sam Slevin was reading and considering a letter which had been forwarded to him, after considerable delay, from Central City.

His wounds were rapidly healing, and he could then sit up and go about a little.

Kate Herries's kindly care, with the assiduous attentions of Muggs of Muggsville, had greatly aided his recovery.

The letter he was reading was from Moses Atterbury, Kansas City, and was in these words:

"SAMUEL SLEVIN, Esq.:—

"DEAR SIR:—Your favor of the 19th ult., is at hand, and contents noted.

"I regret my inability to give you any further or more definite description of the woman I am seeking. I have never seen her, nor do I know any person who has met her.

"It must be about twenty-five years since she was heard of by any of her relatives, and she may be dead, for any knowledge they have of her.

"Of course she may have married; but her maiden name, as I told you, was Margaret Tellson, and she must now, if living, be somewhere between thirty-five and forty years of age.

"She was the only child of John and Maria Tellson, who moved from Missouri to Kansas, and then went further West. Here they died, but nothing is known of the place or manner of their death, or of what became of their daughter.

"The property was left to her by the will of her grandfather, John Tellson, senior, who died in this city at a great age, and since his death it has largely increased in value. If she should not be found, it will go to distant relatives, who have not been slow in making themselves known.

"As you justly observed, it is like hunting a needle in a haystack to look for her; but I already have a clew which promises well.

"Since I wrote you I have received a letter from one Andrew Birkett, who seems to be a prominent citizen of Butte, in Montana, and a man of position and energy.

"He informs me that he believes that he has met Margaret Tellson, and that he can now find her and produce her.

"He gives dates and other particulars which strongly incline me to the opinion that the woman he mentions is the one I am seeking.

"I have requested him to prosecute the search and to keep me advised of the progress of his inquiries.

"It seems to me that it would be well for you to put yourself in communication with this Andrew Birkett. But you are the best judge of that. In any event your expenses will be fully paid, and I inclose herewith a certified check as a retainer.

"Wishing you success in this undertaking, and trusting that I may be spared a long journey, I remain,

"Yours very truly,

"MOSES ATTERBURY."

"Just think of this, Muggs," said Slevin.

"Here is a letter that advises me to put myself in communication with Andrew Birkett. I put myself in communication with him once pretty roughly, and since then he has put himself in communication with me and laid me on my back."

"Reckon you'd better use a shot-gun to communicate with him next time," remarked Muggs.

"Or a rope. It may come to that, if he don't mind his ways, which he isn't likely to do. It is queer that he has got into this case, and his connection with it must mean a swindle of some sort. I can begin to see now what his reason was for wanting to get me out of the way; but why he should try to set Dick Herries against me is more than I can guess out."

"Do you think he has really struck a trail?" inquired Muggs, to whom Sam had read the lawyer's letter.

"He is on some kind of a track I suppose; but it is more likely to be a fraud than a true trail. I must get on it, too, whatever it is, and as soon as I am well enough, I shall watch his movements closely. In the mean time, Muggs, I must rely on your eyes and ears."

"You may bet high on them, boss, when Miss Kate don't need me. But I hope that you will soon git about and 'tend to the case yourself."

CHAPTER XV.

THE STRANGER FROM BANNACK.

SPRING was at hand, if it had not already come, and Butte was joyfully emerging from its hibernation, though there was still plenty of snow on the mountains, when a stranger arrived in the "city" by the junction road from Silver Bow station.

He was not the only passenger by that train, nor was the arrival of a stranger in Butte such a marvelous matter that it should excite comment, nor was there anything specially noteworthy in the appearance of this stranger.

He was a tall and stalwart man, with good features and bright eyes, though his face was nearly covered by a heavy beard, and his eyes were shaded by blue goggles, as if the glare of the sun on the winter's snow had been too much for them.

His hair and beard were so intensely black, that a close observer might have suspected them of too intimate an acquaintance with hair-dye.

His garments, including a fine overcoat trimmed with fur, were of good material and stylish cut, and his general appearance was that of a gentleman of wealth and standing, who was fully up to the times.

He went direct to the best hotel, and registered himself as James H. Ralston, of Bannack City.

Mr. Ralston speedily developed an inquisitive disposition and a fondness for rambling about and taking in all the sights that Butte had to show.

If he had intended to buy the camp, and desired to estimate its value before purchasing, he would not have investigated more closely than he did.

Being of a genial and communicative disposition, he did not scruple to let it be known that he had "struck it rich" in mining property.

But he did not want to sell a mine or to buy a mine, nor was he trying to form a stock company or looking for a partner with capital.

He needed nothing, and had merely come to Butte to look around and have a good time.

Naturally he made acquaintances, and he purchased liquors for them quite freely, though it was noted that he drank nothing that was not strictly non-intoxicant.

It was the positive order of a physician, he said by way of excuse, that caused him to refrain, though his appearance was by no means indicative of ill health.

He frequently expressed a fondness for games of chance (so called), and declared his intention of dropping a few dollars that way before leaving town.

But he was in no hurry to risk his money.

He attended the performance at Concert Hall, formerly the White Elephant, and appeared to be delighted with the entertainment, especially with the acts of Kate Herries, which he applauded vigorously.

Afterward he made inquiries concerning her among his new acquaintances, and picked up many items, interesting and otherwise, about Kate and her family.

It was not to be expected that a stranger of this quality would escape the notice and attentions of Andrew Birkett.

That prominent citizen was fond of making the acquaintance of strangers in the camp who seemed to have money to spend, and it was the general opinion that the acquaintance seldom resulted to the advantage of the stranger.

A man who had struck it rich, who was free with his money, and who had an air of tenderfootedness in spite of his knowing talk and ways, was not likely to be overlooked.

It was easy for Andrew Birkett to form the acquaintance of Mr. Ralston from Bannack, and the two became quite intimate.

After the performance at Concert Hall which the stranger attended they lunched together at a neighboring saloon, with the accompaniment of liquor and cigars.

Mr. Ralston turned the conversation on the performance at Concert Hall.

"That is a nice girl they've got there," he said—"mighty nice for such a show as that."

"Which girl?" inquired Birkett.

"There is only one worth speaking of—the song-and-dance girl. I think her name is Kate Herries."

"Oh, yes, she is nice enough, for that sort."

"What's her sort? Anything the matter with her?"

"Well, I don't know that there is. No worse than the rest, I suppose. But she comes of bad stock, and what can you expect?"

"I have heard something of that. I believe her father was run out of this camp."

"Yes, when we gave the rustlers notice to quit last winter, he had to go with the rest, and it was no worse than he deserved. Dick Herries was his name, and he had amounted to something in his time, but had quite gone to seed. Liquor was the ruin of him, and he had got to be a thief and a general nuisance."

"You were glad to get rid of him, I reckon," observed the stranger.

"I was, for one. I told the committee that we couldn't afford to keep him here and turn the rest adrift. It was a hard duty, but it had to be performed."

"Yes, it must have worried you. I wonder, now, Mr. Birkett, if that isn't the same man who turned up at Bannack in the winter. The name of Herries sounded sorter familiar to me when I heard it here, and I think he called himself Dick Herries."

"What did he look like?" inquired Andrew Birkett.

Mr. Ralston gave a pretty fair description of Dick Herries as he appeared in the days of his poverty and degradation, but pictured him as even a worse wreck than he had been when he was driven from Butte.

"He was said to look sorter like me," observed the stranger, "though I didn't feel a bit thankful to those who said it."

"He did resemble you in some points, Mr. Ralston. But your complexion is a dark brown, and his was very white, except at the nose."

"Pretty good that. You know him by his nose. He brought the same nose to Bannack, and went into business under the same sign. I should say that he was fully ten years older than I am, without trying to flatter myself a bit. He seemed to be broken down in every way, and there was lots of gray in his hair and beard."

"He must have had a devilish rough experience after he left here," observed Birkett. "The wonder to me is that he lived through it."

"He did just manage to pull through somehow. It is hard to kill a tramp."

"Is he in Bannack now?"

"Not much. It ain't a healthy place for such characters these days. He stopped there a little while, bumming around and sponging on the people generally; but they got tired of him, and made him move on."

"It would be better for all concerned if he should quit this wicked world. I don't see what men want to live for when they are played out."

"That is sound doctrine, pard, though folks don't seem to want to live up to it—or die up to it, as I may say. But I don't think that Dick Herries, from what I saw of him, is liable to hold out much longer. And so that girl of his, while he is going to the devil his own way, has struck a broad trail of her own, hey? Is she kinder miscellaneous or promiscuous like, as I might say?"

"Well, not exactly that," answered Birkett a little gruffly, while a heavy frown settled on his face. "But she has started in a way that is likely to lead to that. She has taken up with a fellow named Slevin, an unsettled kind of a scamp, who can't be expected to mean well by her."

"Sorry to hear that, as she looks like a nice girl. If the old man knew the course she is taking, it might worry him some, unless he is too far gone. Well, good-night, Mr. Birkett. See you again."

"Don't you mean to have a bit of poker, then?" inquired Andrew Birkett.

"Not this night. To-morrow night, if you will."

When Ralston had left the saloon he glanced back through the window at Andrew Birkett, who had stepped up to the bar, and even through the blue glasses his eyes gleamed with savage exultation.

"When I do drop on you, my sweet-scented friend," he muttered, "I will drop heavy."

CHAPTER XVI.

SETTLING A SCORE.

THE next night the stranger from Bannack was again in attendance at the Concert Hall.

Again he appeared to be highly pleased with the entertainment, and again he vigorously applauded the acts of Kate Herries.

Kate was on in a sort of dramatic sketch that closed the performance, and it was late when she had resumed her ordinary apparel and started to go home.

She was alone when she came out at the side door by which the *attaches* of the establishment arrived and departed; but she had gone only a little distance when she was joined by Sam Slevin.

He had recovered from his wounds sufficiently to be able to act as her escort; but this was the first time he had ventured out at night.

Kate greeted him joyfully, and insisted that he should take her arm, though he had offered his to her.

Her aid, however, did not cause him to walk any faster, nor did she seem to be in a hurry.

The further they got from the Concert Hall the slower they moved, jogging on together in such earnest and friendly conversation that they looked much like a pair of lovers.

After a little while a quick step was heard behind them, and directly a man passed them swiftly, brushing against Kate so roughly that he started her into a slight cry.

"Look out, there!" sharply ordered Sam Slevin.

But the man swiftly went on, without halting or looking back.

Soon he turned a corner, and disappeared from their view.

"Were you frightened, Kate?" inquired the young man.

"A little; but there is something else that makes me tremble now."

"What is it?"

"Did you notice that man who ran against us so rudely? If I did not know that father is far away from Butte, I would be sure it was he. That man was just his hight and build."

"Stouter, I should say," suggested Slevin.

"He had father's walk, and looked so like him in the back."

"There are plenty of men who might easily be mistaken for your father in the darkness. And you know, Kate, that he would not have passed you without speaking."

"Oh, I don't suppose it was father, and I did not see his face. But the thought really made my heart jump up."

"When the weather begins to get pleasant, Kate, and I get a little stronger, I will go and look for your father, if we do not hear from him in the mean time."

Again they walked on slowly, conversing in such a friendly fashion that they might easily have been mistaken for a pair of lovers.

Sam Slevin accompanied Kate Herries to her door without any further adventure.

He detained her there a few minutes for a little more talk, and then started to return to his own lodging.

Shortly he saw approaching him a tall and well-dressed man, with a heavy black beard, whom he thought he recognized as the person who had rudely encountered Kate Herries.

Considering a difficulty as possible under the circumstances, and knowing that his strength was then unequal to a physical encounter, he felt for his revolver.

The man, however, did not seem inclined to be belligerent.

He halted as they came together, and addressed Slevin amicably.

"Say, stranger, I don't know but I ought to ask your pardon for the way I ran against your friend a bit ago."

"It was a little rough," Sam admitted.

"It was an accident, pard. I was in a hurry, and didn't mean to do it. But I am sorry that I came so near upsetting your doxy when you were walking out with her."

In Slevin's opinion the apology was worse than the offense.

"My what?" he fiercely demanded.

"Doxy is what I said; but if you don't like the word I will take it back."

"I don't like it a bit. My friend is a lady, and must be spoken of as such."

"All right, pard. I thought she was a song-and-dance girl at the show place I was in to-night."

"So she is; but she is a lady, all the same, and a better girl don't walk the earth anywhere."

"Glad to hear it. That sort is apt to be a little off color, you know. You needn't get up on your ear, now. No harm is meant. I am glad to hear that she is the right stuff, and I ask your pardon and hers. Is that square?"

"Square enough," answered the young man. "But let me advise you, my friend, to be a bit more careful how you run against women, and how you speak of them. And if you should hear any man speak a word against that girl, send him to Sam Slevin, and he won't say it twice."

"Bully for you, pard. I like your style. Shake."

They shook hands and separated, Silver Sam wondering a little at the encounter, but not feeling displeased.

The stranger went on to the central or business portion of the town, and entered one of the principal saloons.

It was pretty well filled, but he had no difficulty in finding Andrew Birkett, who seemed to be waiting for somebody.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Ralston," said the prominent citizen. "I was expecting you here to-night, as you told me that you would want to have a little poker."

"All right," answered the stranger from Bannack. "I don't mind if I try a whirl at it now. Can we get a chance to play here without being bothered by a crowd?"

Andrew Birkett led the way to a private room, and called for liquor and cigars.

But Mr. Ralston could not be induced to drink.

"If it wasn't for this throat of mine," said he, "I would be glad enough to join you. But the medical sharp who has got hold of me tells me that there will be the devil to pay inside of my mouth unless I leave liquor alone for a month or so at least."

He condescended to smoke; but Birkett was left to sip his liquor alone.

"I reckon you struck it about right," said Ralston as he lighted his cigar, "in what you told me about the song-and-dance girl in at the show place. I saw her going home with that chap to-night, and she sidled up to him as if she had struck it rich."

"Is he well enough to be out, then?" demanded Birkett.

"Well enough? What's the matter with him?"

"He got into a street fight a while ago, and was nearly killed."

"Well, he is up and about now. Anyhow, a man I asked about that chap I saw with the girl told me that his name was Slevin. Reckon the man I met at Bannack would be worried if he knew how she is going on."

"Perhaps he would if he is not beyond the reach of worry by this time. By the way, Mr. Ralston, speaking of that Dick Herries, it is a little singular that in this very room, not many months ago, I beat him out of ten thousand dollars at poker!"

"Ten thousand dollars! Ginger! that is a pile for a poker game. So the man had money once?"

"Plenty of it; but drink got the upper hand of him, and it melted away."

"Was he drunk when you won that pile?"

"He was a little off, I suppose, or I wouldn't have got it."

"You scare me, Mr. Birkett. I am afraid to play poker with a man who has won ten thousand dollars at one pull."

"But you are sober," remarked the prominent citizen.

"Yes, I am sober because I have to be. But I don't pretend to play much poker. However, I am willing to chance you, pard, and if you win ten thousand from me, you will be welcome to it."

Is it not worth while to chronicle the details of the game that ensued.

It is enough to say that the two men played it for all it was worth, and that the betting rapidly mounted from the tens to the hundreds and thousands.

Andrew Birkett was astonished.

He was more than astonished; he was bewildered, dumfounded, completely broken up.

The game ceased when the stranger from Bannack had won ten thousand dollars, and the pockets of the prominent citizen of Butte were emptied of their last dollar.

He could not have told how it was done.

If there was anything crooked in the game, he had been unable to discover it.

But his money had been captured, and he had lost his last stake just when he was sure of winning a pile.

"The cards seem to be running against you to-night, pard," said Ralston, as he stuffed the money into his pockets. "Whenever you want to get even, and I happen to be in town, I will give you a chance. Or you can hunt me up if you come down to Bannack."

Andrew Birkett made no answer.

"It's a little funny, pard, that you should have dropped to me in this room just the amount of money that you won here from that man Herries. Reckon he would laugh if he knew it. But he is likely to be beyond the reach of that sort of thing by this time."

The prominent citizen was silent and seemed to be stupefied.

"Good-night, pard, and better luck next time," said the stranger from Bannack, as he walked out.

The next morning Mr. Ralston had paid his bill at the hotel and taken the early train for the south.

That morning, too, Kate Herries received a letter which was written the day before, and which she would have received sooner if it had not been mislaid.

It was written by Andrew Birkett, and it contained this painful paragraph:

"I have heard of that father of yours. I met a gentleman from Bannack last night, who told me that Dick Herries struck that camp in the winter. He was drinking as hard as ever, and was humming around there, all broke up, until the people got tired of him and made him move on. I don't think you are likely to see him or hear of him again, and if you want any help from me you have only to come down off your high horse and say so."

Poor Kate was crying over this letter when Sam Slevin came in.

When he wanted to know what was the matter with her, she showed it to him, and his anger rose to white heat as he read it.

"The infernal scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "He has done this with the purpose of worrying you, and for no other reason in the world. Any man who would write such a letter as that ought to be shot on sight, and I will go right out and settle with him."

"You must not think of such a thing," she tearfully insisted. "You are not strong enough to fight anybody."

"My nerve is good enough to punish that mean hound, and I will take no chances on such a sneak."

"Please don't do it, Sam," she entreated. "For my sake you must not. Things are bad enough now, and that would make them much worse. But oh, Sam, can the story he tells me be true? When father went away from here I was almost sure that he would go straight."

"It is more than likely that the scoundrel lies," answered Slevin, though he inwardly admitted that his doubts were the other way.

Muggs of Muggsville came in at this juncture with a letter in his hand.

"A man who was goin' off on the kyars gimme this letter for you, Miss Kate," said he, "and I couldn't seem to git around no sooner."

Kate uttered a joyful cry as she took the letter.

"It is father's handwriting!" she exclaimed.

"I am sure it is."

She tore it open, glanced over it hastily, and handed it to Sam Slevin, while the tears streamed down her cheeks.

But they were tears of joy.

The letter was signed by Dick Herries, and was in these words:

"MY DEAR KATE:—

"I have been in Butte two days, but have had good reasons of my own for not coming to see you.

"I have struck it rich, and am going straight as a line, and may hope soon to be a rich man.

"I saw Sam Slevin with you last night, and spoke to him afterward, and am glad to know that he is the style of man he is. I had heard of him at Boreman's.

"I have also seen Andrew Birkett, and have settled part of my score with him. Have struck him for a big pile at poker, which I will carry away with me.

"As soon as the weather is pleasant, and I get things fairly started, I shall want you to come to me, and I will send for you."

CHAPTER XVII.

ANDREW BIRKETT'S EXPEDITION.

SPRING had fairly opened, and the hills and valleys were beginning to grow green and blossomy.

The brooks and creeks were no longer filled to overflowing with melted snow, and the roads and trails were rapidly drying up and becoming passable.

Then it was that Andrew Birkett, without informing any person but Josh Cattermole of his departure and destination, sallied forth from Butte and struck off into the hills.

He was evidently bound on a journey, as he was well mounted and armed, and he led an Indian pony that was heavily loaded and carefully packed.

But he did not get away as secretly as he doubtless fancied he did.

For some time he had been constantly shadowed, and all his movements had been closely watched by Sam Slevin and his faithful henchman, Muggs of Muggsville.

Hardly had he got out of sight of the camp when Slevin, also well mounted and armed, set forth to follow him.

The young man's wounds were then entirely healed, and he had fully recovered his strength.

He was also actuated by an eager desire to follow a trail and unearth a secret that seemed to be more than ordinarily interesting.

Andrew Birkett followed the route which his emissary had taken in the depth of the winter; but it was then much more pleasant and less perilous than Josh Cattermole had found it.

After him, but at the distance of a few miles in the rear, rode Slevin.

The trail had not previously been traveled that spring, and the horse-tracks were plain enough on the soft ground.

Therefore the pursuer had no difficulty in following it and in keeping the distance he had prescribed for himself.

He camped at the camps of the man he was shadowing, and invariably dropped back when he happened to come in sight of the object of his pursuit.

Birkett went steadily forward until he reached the cabin at the mouth of the canyon where Josh Cattermole had his exciting experience with the avalanche.

There he halted, bailed the house, and was welcomed gladly, if not with much emotion, by Bet Rawson.

He hitched his horses, and proceeded to unload the pack pony, on which he had brought a supply of provisions and other necessities, such as Josh Cattermole had brought on his sled.

The woman helped him carry in the stuff, and but few words were spoken between them until they were both inside with the door closed.

Then she mixed for him something hot and strong, such as she had mixed for his emissary, and settled herself to hear and give the news.

"How is she?" inquired Birkett, pointing, as Cattermole had, at the partition.

"About the same," answered Bet Rawson. "There hasn't been much change to notice; but she seems to get more mopeish all the while, and I think it is doubtful if she will last through the summer if she is kept cooped up there."

"Josh told me that you were afraid that she might go out of her mind."

"Sometimes I've had a notion that way; but the biggest fear is, I should say, that she may go into a hole in the ground."

"I must settle the business, then, as soon as possible."

"That's what you'd better do, Andy, and have no nonsense about it. I'm getting tired of this sort of thing, and my patience won't last much longer. Who is she, anyhow?"

"She is a woman through whom I expect to get a pile of money."

"I know that; but I want to know what she is to you outside of that. Is she a married woman?"

"Yes."

"You ought to understand, Andy Birkett, that I ain't keen to have you fooling around any woman, married or unmarried."

"Why, Bet, how can I fool around this one? She is here in your care, and I never see her anywhere but here, and you know that it is always on business."

"Yes, and you keep me cooped up here, ever so many miles away from anybody, working like a mule, while you are flourishing around and having a good time where I can't begin to watch you. I tell you I am getting tired of it, and won't stand it much longer. You've got to finish up that business, if it is business, and take me to Butte or somewhere, and set me up as a lady. You are rich enough for that now, and I don't mean to stand any nonsense."

"All right, old girl. I will do the best I can. It stands me in hand to settle that business as soon as I can, because I dropped quite a pile of money a little while ago."

"How was that?" asked the woman with a suspicious look and tone.

"A stranger who came up from Bannack beat me out of ten thousand dollars at poker."

"Ten thousand dollars! Immortal Caesar! That was a pile to slip out of your hands. Were you drunk? Were you crazy? I thought you could play the game. How did you ever get knocked out to that tune?"

"I took the man for a tenderfoot and thought I had a sure thing."

"Immortal Caesar! Have you really got to be as soft as that? It is hard for me to believe it. If that's the way you take care of your money, Andy Birkett, you need to have me around to look after you."

Bet Rawson prepared supper, grumbling and snapping a little as she did so; but Birkett paid scarcely any attention to her.

After supper he went into the other room, and remained there about half an hour.

The Rawson woman listened against the partition and with her ear to the keyhole, but got little satisfaction out of that performance, the partition being particularly close and solid.

She could hear the sound of sobbing, and a woman's voice raised in reproaches and supplications, but nothing distinct or definite.

The man's voice seemed to be calm and persuasive; but it was pitched in such a low key that no words reached the ear of the listener.

Yet Bet Rawson's face darkened as she stood there.

"If he plays me false," she muttered, "or even tries to play me false, I will have the heart's blood of both of them."

When Birkett came out, he looked pale and worn, as if the interview had been a trying one to him.

"How are things now?" asked Bet Rawson.

"She nearly worries the life out of me," he answered. "I don't suppose that I am much softer hearted than most folks—"

"Nobody else supposes it," interjected Bet.

"But it pulls me down to see a woman cry as she does, and to have to listen to her reproaches. It drags the heart from me."

"Mine never dragged much out of you," she remarked.

"Oh, you never cry and beg. You generally order a thing instead of asking for it, and you are always able to take your own part."

"You may bet your life on that! Andy Birkett, and I mean to do it. How does the business scheme work?"

"There is going to be bother about it, but no serious difficulty, I hope. I must get a power of attorney from her, and it has got to be done in a legal fashion. She says that she is willing to do anything that will take her back to her folks, and that will do it, as I tell her. But I can't take her to Butte to go through the legal formality, and I don't want to take her up to Helena or anywhere else. So I shall have to find a man who will come out here and do the trick for money, and that is what I mean to do."

"Go and do it then, and I give you fair notice that you had better hurry up."

The next morning Andrew Birkett set out to return to Butte by the route which he had followed in coming to the canyon.

But he had not gone far when he noticed something peculiar about the trail he had made.

It was double.

Another horse had added to the trail shortly after it was made.

When Birkett came to the last camp he had used before reaching the cabin, it was easy for him to discover the fact that one other person had stopped there.

This was just what he wanted to know, as it was enough to satisfy him that he had been followed.

Andrew Birkett was no fool.

If he had not been unusually sharp he would not have been alive then and out of jail.

He was also versed in the ways of the men who traversed the Western wilds—the crooked as well as the straight men.

The route he had taken was so seldom traveled that it was a remarkable circumstance to find signs of anybody but himself there.

The other person, if he had been disposed to be friendly, and had no sinister motive, would have hastened forward to overtake the man in advance of him and claim his companionship.

But this one had seemed studiously to lag behind at a carefully regulated distance, as if he were simply dogging the steps of the other.

Having settled it in his mind that he had been followed, Andrew Birkett determined to ascertain who had followed him and for what purpose.

Therefore he turned back.

In doing so he did not follow the double trail again, but took a roundabout course until he came once more in view of the cabin at the mouth of the canyon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAKING A BOTCH OF IT.

WHEN Sam Slevin, following the man whom he had shadowed from Butte, came in sight of Bet Rawson's cabin, he was soon aware of the fact that Andrew Birkett had reached his destination.

The sight of the two horses that were hitched outside of the cabin was sufficient to decide that point.

As no person was in sight, and night was coming on, he soon settled upon the course he should pursue.

He rode aside in a wooded glen on the side of the valley opposite to the cabin, where he tethered his horse and prepared some supper for himself.

Then he made his way on foot over to the cabin.

In crossing the valley he was surprised to see what mounds of snow were still left there, and justly concluded that they had been brought down there by slides in the early spring.

There was a light in the cabin, dimly seen through a nearly closed shutter, and the two horses were still hitched outside.

Therefore it was reasonable to suppose that Andrew Birkett was inside, and that the object of his expedition to that out-of-the-way place could be ascertained by a little judicious espionage.

As he approached the cabin it gratified him to perceive that there were no dogs about, as even a toy terrier might have proved troublesome to him just then.

He moved as noiselessly, however, as if every step might arouse an enemy, and at once applied himself to the task of endeavoring to see or hear what was going on inside.

Seeing, as he soon discovered, was quite out of the question, and hearing was almost equally unsatisfactory.

The cabin was not only very stoutly built, but was so thoroughly chinked and daubed that no light came through any cracks, a little only being visible at the shutter crevice, through which nothing of the interior could be seen.

Voices within could be heard from the outside; but they were pitched in so low a key, owing to the wish of Birkett and Bet Rawson to keep their conversation from passing through the partition that only a confused murmur reached Slevin.

He was convinced, however, that one of the voices was Birkett's, and another was that of a woman.

It was reasonable, therefore, to suppose that he was on the trail of the Margaret Tellson for whom he was searching, and of whose whereabouts Birkett was presumed to be aware.

Anxious to get an inkling of what was going on in there, he shifted his position several times, moving carefully and noiselessly; but no change brought him any appreciable benefit.

An additional disadvantage was found in the fact that the cabin had but three sides that were accessible, the fourth being set closely against the rock.

If any person should happen to come out while he was there, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to conceal himself.

He decided that he would run that risk, and he waited and listened until the entire cessation of conversation and the darkening of the cabin convinced him its occupants had retired for the night.

Then he recrossed the valley to the glen where he had left his horse, wrapped himself in his blanket, and got such sleep as the chilliness of the night allowed him.

At dawn the next morning he was astir, and after a hasty breakfast he took up a position from which he could see without being seen all that passed in the neighborhood of the cabin.

He had not long to wait before there was something to be seen.

A woman came out of the cabin, got some wood from a small pile near the door, and carried it in.

Then the chimney began to smoke in a lively manner, and doubtless breakfast was being prepared.

After a while Andrew Birkett came out, looked up at the sky, sauntered about a few minutes, and then went back into the cabin.

In the course of an hour he came out again,

this time accompanied by the woman, and proceeded to saddle his horse.

She remained there until he mounted and rode away, and Sam had a good view of her.

At that distance he was not able to distinguish her features, but could see that she was tall and of a rather formidable appearance.

When Birkett rode down the valley and took up the trail toward Butte, Slevin watched him until he was out of sight, and then prepared to go over to the cabin and make the acquaintance of the woman there.

The plan he proposed to himself was to interview her and learn whether she was Margaret Tellson, and if so, whether she was an accomplice of Andrew Birkett's or a victim.

In this plan he was reckoning without any suspicion of what Bet Rawson might do in the matter.

It was his intention to approach her in the character of a casual passing traveler, so that she should not suspect that the visit had any special meaning.

With this view he mounted his horse, made a little circuit, and rode up to the cabin by the trail that Andrew Birkett had made in going and returning.

Knowing the customs of the country and the need of caution, he hailed the house before dismounting.

The hail was twice repeated before it was answered.

Then the door was partly opened, and the woman he had seen showed herself at the entrance.

She was not only formidable in her personal appearance, but carried a repeating rifle of fine workmanship and excellent quality.

She carried it, too, in a way that indicated her intention and ability to use it as the occasion should require.

It was cocked, and was held so that a very slight change in its direction would aim it at the stranger's breast.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she gruffly demanded.

This was not a bit encouraging, but Sam tried to make the best of the situation.

"I want to cross the divide," he said, "and am not sure that I am in the right way, as I am a stranger in these parts. Will you tell me if I can get through this canyon?"

"All you've got to do is to keep straight ahead," was her uncompromising reply. "Go on, and keep going."

"Thank you. You are very kind. Will you also be so kind as to give me my breakfast, and allow me to pay you for your trouble?"

"Nary breakfast—nary pay—nary nothin'. A scallawag came along here the other day, who would have cleaned me out of house and home, if I hadn't got the drop on him."

"But I am a stranger, and there is no harm in me."

"I am a lone woman, and I don't cotton to strangers a bit. The less I see of them, and the further off they are, the better I like them. Will you be so kind as to git?"

She emphasized her polite request by pointing her rifle at him.

This was far from encouraging—in fact, it had a dangerous look—but Sam stood his ground.

"Please don't point that thing this way," he began, in his most persuasive tones. "It might go off."

"So it might, unless you go off. The best thing you can do is to get out of its way."

"You are too handsome a woman to be so hardhearted. Your face seems to be familiar to me. I must have met you somewhere before now. Is it possible that you are Miss Tellson?"

The woman's face changed just a little, but did not soften in the least.

"I might be Miss Tellson," she grimly replied, "or Mrs. Tellson, for that matter; but I ain't, and it's none of your business who I am. Whoever you are, you ain't wanted here, and all you've got to do is to go right off, or this gun will. I know men, and I know guns, and I mean business from the word go."

There was no arguing with such a woman, and it was not the part of a man to fight her.

So there was nothing for Sam to do but to back out and retire from the unequal contest of words.

This he did as gracefully as possible, with his best bow and his most pleasant smile.

The woman went back into the house, but kept a crack of the door open so that she could view his retreating form as long as it was in sight.

"That's a mighty nice young man," was her summary of the situation, "and I'd have been glad enough to ask him in and have a chat with him. But, things being as things are, I can't fool with his sort."

"He ain't going through the canyon, though, and he didn't have the least notion of going that way. I am prepared to bet high on that as a fact. So I reckon he must be some kind of a spy, and it's a good thing that I warned him off."

"But he is a nice young man."

"Durned if I ain't tired of this sort of thing, and I don't mean to stand it much longer, as sure's my name is Bet Rawson."

CHAPTER XIX.

A FEW SURPRISES.

THE nice young man who had been driven away by Bet Rawson, speedily justified her predictions concerning his course.

He did not go through the canyon, or attempt to do so, or even pretend to take that direction.

He could not do so without going a long way out of the route he intended to pursue, and it was not worth while to make any bones of the rest of his doings.

Of course the sharp woman he had left would easily perceive that he had not told her the truth in saying that he wanted to go through the canyon.

But what of that?

A lie more or less could not matter, since he was convinced that he had made a botch of the whole business.

Yes, he had made a botch of it, and yet he could not see how he might have improved the performance.

His failure was due entirely to the extraordinary character of that woman.

Who and what was the woman?

When he came to sum her up, he was driven to the conclusion that there was nothing in that cabin which it would be worth his while to investigate.

It was true that the woman appeared to be about the age of Margaret Tellson, according to the description that had been sent him, if Margaret Tellson were still alive.

But could so slight and delicate a girl as Margaret Tellson had been, with light hair and blue eyes, have grown to be such a tall and formidable person, with dark eyes and hair?

The supposition was unreasonable, if not impossible, and his conclusion naturally was that he had started on a false trail which he need not follow any further.

The woman was probably some relative or dependent of Andrew Birkett's; but it was not worth while to inquire what she really was.

Having settled this point in his mind, there was nothing for him to do but return to Butte and endeavor to make a fresh start in some direction.

He did not have to give any thought to the route he was following, as the trail was then plain enough, and his horse would keep it without any guidance.

When he reached the last camp of the journey out, he perceived that Andrew Birkett had stopped there again on his return, and he also stopped there and ate his dinner.

Then he pushed forward carelessly, letting his horse go as he pleased, and giving no attention to the trail or his surroundings.

His thoughts, indeed, after wandering through the details of the Margaret Tellson case, and indulging in many guesses and surmises, finally settled on Kate Herries, and she became the subject of what may be called a waking dream.

From this reverie he was rudely aroused by the starting and shying of his horse, and then by the sharp report of a rifle.

So close is the connection of thought and feeling between an experienced frontiersman and his horse, that the first shiver of the animal he rode told Sam Slevin that there was danger at hand, and he was not really surprised when he heard the shot.

The horse had seen and shied at some suspicious object a little in advance of him, and had thrown up his head.

It was this action, probably, that had saved his rider's life.

A bullet that had been intended for the man entered the horse's head under the jaw, and passed up into his brain, killing him almost instantly.

Sam's feet were on the ground before his horse fell, and instantly he had his rifle ready for action, making a bulwark of the poor beast's body.

Suddenly as this peril came upon him, he had seen the flash and the smoke, and had noted the tree from behind which the shot was fired.

He heard a rustling in the bushes beyond that point, and fired at the sound, but seemingly without effect.

Directly a man on horseback dashed out from the timber at a point some distance further up the trail, and rode off at a gallop.

As he was followed by an unsaddled pony, there could be no doubt that the escaped assassin was Andrew Birkett.

The situation was then plain enough to Sam Slevin, as he sorrowfully confessed to himself.

His enemy had discovered his presence in that vicinity, had doubtless divined his intentions, and had waylaid him on his return with the object of stopping his investigations by putting an end to his life.

This was the second attempt Andrew Birkett had made to murder him, and each had been nearly successful.

Just then he was confronted by the sad fact that his horse had been made the victim of the assassin's bullet, and that he was afoot.

There was no help for this calamity, and all he could do was to pick up his feet and tramp back to Butte.

He packed his bag of provisions on his back, trudged on manfully, gritting his teeth as he re-

solved that he would more than get even with the scoundrel who had put him in that pickle.

As Andrew Birkett must be aware of the fact that he had not accomplished his deadly purpose, it was likely that he would make another attempt to waylay and murder his enemy.

Therefore Sam left the trail, and followed a route that made his journey on foot more tedious and difficult than it would otherwise have been.

But Andrew Birkett, if he had any idea of attempting another assassination, did not put it in execution.

He rode on rapidly and steadily, congratulating himself at least upon having discomfited his adversary, until he got back to Butte.

There he reported to Josh Cattermole, as Josh had reported to him, and they discussed the prospects of the scheme for getting hold of Margaret Tellson's money.

"Everything seems to be as plain and straight as it can be made," observed Cattermole, "and the scheme is bound to work if you can get hold of the right kind of a man to go out there and fix up the power of attorney."

"That is as good as settled," replied Birkett. "I know a man who will do the job for money, and it will be to his interest to keep quiet about it."

"The sooner you fix up the business the better, then, as the woman may drop out, or Bet Rawson may fly off the handle at any time. Of course that Sam Slevin was on the scent of something when he went out there. I hope he didn't make any discoveries."

"Trust Bet Rawson to head him off there."

"He must have known that it was you who shot at him, gov'nor, and he will be hot as fire against you now."

"He has had good cause to be hot against me before now. I don't scare on that account. I shall watch him, though."

"One thing more, gov'nor. I struck a big piece of news while you were away. I have heard of Dick Herries."

"Has he gone under, then? It was only a little while ago that I heard that he was nearly ready to drop into a hole in the ground."

"That news was bogus. You were fooled there, and that is where the joke comes in."

"What do you mean, Josh?"

"Dick Herries is well and strong, and has quit drink, and has made a man of himself again. He has struck it rich, too, has had the biggest kind of luck, and is now half-owner of a splendid find that has just begun to be worked and is panning out immensely."

"It can't be so."

"But it is so, gov'nor. I had the news from a man I know well, who ain't in the habit of lying. He told me that Dick Herries was up here a while ago, just about the time you met that stranger from Bannack."

Andrew Birkett jumped up, his face flaming with rage, and poured forth a stream of curses.

"Do you see the point?" inquired Cattermole.

"See it? I feel it. I ought to be kicked all over the camp for letting such a trick be played on me. That man from Bannack—the man who called himself Rakston, and who told me that yarn about Dick Herries—was Dick Herries himself! I noticed the resemblance, and he spoke of it, and—oh, what an infernal fool I have been! It was he who beat me out of ten thousand dollars at poker. He came up here in that shape on purpose to get square with me, and he did it. Who would have thought that I could be such a lunk-headed idiot?"

"I don't see that you need cuss yourself, gov'nor. Nobody else dropped on him, and it wasn't a bit likely that Dick Herries would turn up so soon and in such gay style."

"That's all very well, Josh; but I can't forgive myself, all the same. I mean to get even with him now, if it is the last thing I do in this world, and everything else has got to give way to that."

"Not quite everything, I hope," suggested Cattermole.

"Oh, that Tellson business will go on, of course. That is counted in the game."

Though Andrew Birkett had said that he meant to watch Sam Slevin, he did not happen to see him when he trudged into Butte at the end of his long and wearisome tramp from the spot where his horse had been shot down.

It was before noon when the young man arrived, and as soon as he had made himself fit to be seen, he hastened to call on Kate Herries.

She greeted him joyfully, and an outsider would have had good ground for the suspicion that they were a pair of lovers.

"I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "You were so long away that I began to be afraid that you would never come back, and I have such good news to tell you."

"It will be a blessing to hear some good news. What is it, Kate?"

"First tell me where you have been and what kept you away such a long time."

"It was a matter of business which would not interest you, and it would take a long time to explain it. It is enough to say that I succeeded

in doing nothing, and had my trouble for my pains."

He carefully avoided any reference to Andrew Birkett's attempt upon his life, as that would only needlessly distress the girl.

"I hope that my guess about your news is right," he said.

"What is your guess, Sam?"

"That it is from your father."

"That is just what it is. I have got such a long and lovely letter from him, and it is full of such amazing good news. He is part owner of a mine, and it is a new mine and a very rich one, though it has just been opened. He could sell out, he says, at a big figure, but will get a great deal more money by holding on and working the mine."

"That is what he meant when he told you that he had struck it rich," suggested Slevin.

"Of course it is. I can't guess how it happened. It is simply wonderful. But he said when he went away that perhaps the notice to quit Butte was the best thing that could happen to him, and it seems that it has been. Now he says that he wants me to go right down there and join him, and the best of it is, Sam, that he wants you to take me."

"That suits me, Kate. Where is the mine?"

"In the Bannack region, at a place called Whitewood Canyon."

"All right. Get ready as soon as you please, and I will attend to everything else."

Before leaving Butte Sam Slevin attended to a little matter of business.

He had formed the opinion that Andrew Birkett would not have wantonly and causelessly have made that second attempt upon his life.

The prominent citizen must have had something to gain by his dastardly deed, and the something must be connected with Slevin's abortive expedition.

There must be some mystery connected with the cabin out yonder which the man from Central City had failed to fathom.

As it was not likely that at the present time he would himself be able to accomplish anything in that quarter, he decided that it might be a good plan to put Muggs of Muggsville on the scent and let him try his hand.

Therefore he explained the circumstances to his satellite, and gave him such instructions as seemed fitting, but left the matter mainly to his discretion.

CHAPTER XX.

WHITEWOOD MINE.

A STRANGE and wonderful region is the Great Divide, where streams on one side of the immense mountain range feed the rivers that empty into the Pacific, and on the other side the waters start on the long journey that finally brings them to the distant Atlantic.

Drops of rain that fall but a few yards apart have destinations that are separated by thousands of miles.

In the heart of that wild and wonderful region was Whitewood Canyon.

It was not a true canyon, because it was in no sense a pass, and did not lead through or to anything.

It began as a canyon, starting from a level as a narrow gorge with precipitous side, through which ran a stream that was part of the headwaters of the Yellowstone.

But its character changed soon after it had fairly been entered, and "No Thoroughfare" was written plainly on all its features.

Then the sides became less precipitous, and the rocky incline acquired a steeper ascent, until finally it spread out into the hills that climbed and towered upward until they joined the snow-topped mountains which formed that part of the backbone of the continent.

To reach Whitewood Canyon it was necessary to traverse a mountainous district, and then descend into a well-wooded and watered plain or valley, much like the Parks of Colorado.

On the western side of the level was the canyon, so called, and at the head of the canyon—that is to say, where it ceased to be a canyon—was the mine which was the joint property of Angus Dameron and Richard Herries.

It was not yet in full operation, but had been fairly opened, and the yield and the prospect were highly encouraging to all concerned, from the proprietors down to the humblest laborer with pick and drill.

Already its renown had gone abroad, and its promise was so good that quite a settlement had been established near the mouth of the canyon.

The mine had been styled the Whitewood mine, and the settlement had received the name of Whitewood.

On the northern bank of the creek was a general supply store of some pretensions, and near it, scattered about the plain, were two saloons and a number of shanties, mostly built of logs, which were plentiful there.

At that time Whitewood, of course, had a new and temporary appearance, as if the camp had been hastily thrown together and might be swept away at any moment; but a town site had been laid out and platted, and a land office had been established, and the present inhabi-

tants indulged in the great expectations common to nearly all such settlements.

On the other side of the creek, near the head of the slope, and close to the mountain-side, was a roomy and comfortable log cabin.

Near it, and occupying a very eligible location, was a shanty building which was doubtless intended to pass for a cottage, nearly completed and already partly furnished.

Seated in an arm-chair at the door of the cabin, propped up with blankets and pillows, was a tall man, pale and emaciated, whose long hair and heavy beard contrasted strangely with his feeble physical appearance.

This invalid was Angus Dameron, who had experienced a return of the illness that had prostrated him before Jim Boggs attempted to put him out of the world, and had been confined to the cabin since the opening of the mine.

Near him stood Dick Herries, a tall and stalwart man, his black hair and beard streaked with gray, but looking a picture of health and vigorous manhood.

He was conversing with Dameron, but his gaze was frequently turned toward the road that crossed the open country and was lost in the rocky region at the eastward.

"So the ore is proving richer than we expected," remarked Dameron. "We can bear to be disappointed that way. I only wish that I could be strong enough to get about and attend to business. But it is a consolation to know that I can depend on you for that."

"I believe you can, partner, and I have some reliable men to help me. Young Dave Boreman makes a capital foreman, and his father is very useful. Everything is going on well. We could not wish for a better prospect or a better performance."

"We are in luck, Dick, but our prosperity is largely owing to you. We would have been in a bad fix but for your profitable visit to Butte. The ten thousand dollars you brought down straightened us up nicely."

"Yes, it helped us to open out the mine and get a good start without a dollar of debt; and now if we needed to use our credit we would find it first-class."

"There is only one thing that worries me, Dick, besides my health. I am sorry that we did not bury Jim Boggs before we left the cabin under the snow."

"It would have been the decent thing to do, no doubt; but it was impossible just then. It was as much as we could do to get ourselves away, and there would have been another dead man in the snow if you had stayed there any longer."

"It is a pity. But we ought to look after that matter, now that spring has fairly opened."

"I will attend to it, partner. I will send Stephen Boreman, if I can't find time to go there myself."

"Where are your thoughts wandering to now, Dick? What are you looking off yonder for?"

"I am looking for my daughter. Don't you know that? I expected her two days ago, and now I am looking for her all the time. The stage ought to be in before night. If it does not bring her, I shall be afraid that some misfortune has occurred."

"What could happen?"

"Much might happen. I am afraid of Andrew Birkett, the man from whom I won that ten thousand dollars. I had supposed him to be my friend, but have since learned that he was my worst enemy. I settled one account by that turn at poker; but there is more behind, and I am afraid for the girl when she is anywhere near him."

"But that young man of whom you have been speaking to me, Dick—that Sam Slevin—he can be relied on to take care of her."

"I believe so; but I shall feel uneasy until she comes."

"When she does get here, Dick, what a joy she will be to us!"

"Yes, she will light up Whitewood—you may bet high on that. And you will be nicely taken care of then, partner, and I may hope to see you around soon. Hello! I believe that's the stage at last!"

Out from the timber on the plain came a dark and dingy vehicle, drawn by four tired horses, which was easily recognized as the conveyance which periodically connected Whitewood with the outer world.

As it approached the settlement, Dick Herries declared that he saw the flutter of calico about the contraption.

He waved his handkerchief, and there was an answering wave from the vehicle.

"That must be Kate!" he joyfully exclaimed, and he ran down the slope and crossed the creek to meet her.

It was indeed Kate Herries, who had been the star of the stage route during her brief engagement as a passenger, and was the cynosure of all eyes when she escaped from the contraption of Whitewood.

But all admirers were obliged to give way to her father, who clasped her in his arms, as if she had safely issued from a great peril, and carried her off in triumph.

Then the stage-driver became the hero of the occasion, and everybody was anxious to buy his

liquor for him, and to ply him with questions concerning his fair passenger.

Sam Slevin, who came with her, was also warmly greeted by Dick Herries, and was taken across the creek to the new house on the hill.

CHAPTER XXI.

DICK HERRIES'S GREAT TROUBLE.

THE arrival of Kate Herries and Sam Slevin made changes at Whitewood; but they were all pleasant and happy changes.

The new house was finished and furnished as rapidly as possible, and Angus Dameron was installed in its most comfortable room, with Kate as his nurse and cheerful companion.

He was highly delighted with this arrangement; but, in spite of all that could be done for him, his physical condition did not visibly improve.

Sam Slevin had an "understanding" with Dick Herries, which was quite satisfactory to both, and the result of it was that Sam was accepted as Kate's suitor, if not yet as her future husband.

On other points they had a pretty plain and definite understanding, which covered not only the relations which had formerly subsisted between Dick Herries and Andrew Birkett, but the disappearance of the latter's wife.

On this point Herries was evidently unwilling to dwell.

"I thought that perhaps you would have heard about it from Kate," he said.

"Only the fact of Mrs. Herries's disappearance," answered Sam. "It seemed to be a sore subject with her, and I did not care to question her closely. But it is different with you. Hard as it may be to speak of it, it is best to face up the truth. I hope you will believe that I don't ask any questions out of mere curiosity, but because a full knowledge of the facts may help me to be more useful to you than I otherwise could be."

"I believe you, Sam, and I am sure that I can trust you. After all, there is not so much to tell. It is about the same story that has been so often told of other people—the old story of a false friend and a faithless wife."

"But I would never have believed it possible that my wife could turn out in that way. She was not strong physically, and was never given to any flighty ways, but always seemed to be devoted to her home and especially to her child."

"But there is no telling what may happen, or who is likely to go astray."

"There came to Butte a man I had known in Cheyenne and elsewhere, and with whom I had been quite intimate. His name was Matt Grace."

"Matt Grace!" exclaimed Slevin, opening his eyes widely.

"Yes. I suppose you have met him. He was a well-known man, and a handsome fellow, with airy and dashy ways, who was sure to be noticed wherever he went. He was a gambler, you know—one of our high-toned card sharps—with a big reputation for brilliant play."

"He took to me, of course, and I took to him, and we were such friends that I invited him to my house, and he spent a good part of his time there."

"He was so fond of being there that I got the idea that he was struck on my Kate."

"Why, he was a married man," interrupted Sam.

"Was he? I didn't know that. It makes the case worse. Anyhow, I will never allow Kate to marry a gambler if I can help it, and I told her as much. But she declared that she had no idea of doing anything of the kind, and said in a joking way that she thought it was her mother to whom Mr. Grace was paying attention."

"Of course I laughed at that, and then I thought nothing more of the matter until Andrew Birkett began to make insinuating remarks to me about Matt Grace being so much in the company of my wife."

"I was mad enough at first to take the top of his head off, but he assured me that he was speaking to me as a friend, and I became convinced that he had observed some incidents which had escaped my attention."

"After that, though I watched pretty closely, I saw nothing that I could really call suspicious; but you know how jealousy grows on a man, and Andrew Birkett kept feeding the fire by telling me of little things which he had seen or heard."

"I was obliged to go up to Helena to attend to some matters of business, and when I got home I found Kate in a terrible state of trouble."

"Her mother was missing—had simply disappeared without giving any hint of her intentions or leaving the least clue by which she could be traced."

"Kate only knew that her mother had gone out in the evening, saying that she would return shortly, and had not returned at all."

"Nobody knew what had become of her, and nobody had even noticed her after she left the house."

"I made searches and inquiries, but succeeded only in discovering the fact that Matt Grace had left town the day of her disappearance, and

nobody knew whither he had gone or how he got away.

"It was easy to put this and that together and to come to the conclusion that Matt Grace and my wife had eloped.

"I hunted them high and low, making as little fuss as possible about the business, and Birkett assisted me in the search; but neither of us made any discoveries.

"I was obliged to admit that it was as clear cut and well managed a case of elopement as was ever contrived.

"I think I must have been crazy after that. Anyhow, I went wrong, and tumbled down hill as fast as a man could go.

"You know the rest of it, of course.

"That notice to quit brought me up all standing, and I determined that if I lived through what was before me then I would be a man again for Kate's sake.

"I did live through it, and luck has favored me, and there are good prospects for the two of us; but I can never expect to recover from that blow.

"I can't shut my wife out of my thoughts, no matter how hard I try, and I am continually worrying about her and wishing I could know what has become of her.

"Now, Mr. Slevin, you know as much about my trouble as I know or as Kate knows, and I suppose you will agree with me that there is nothing in the world to be done about it."

"I will admit nothing of the kind," answered Sam. "I am glad that you have given me the exact particulars of the sad business as far as you know them, and am sure that something can be done to satisfy your mind, if not to relieve you."

"What can be done, Sam? And why do you say that I gave you the particulars as far as I know them? Do you know anything more about the matter than I have told you?"

"I do not; but I am strongly inclined to believe that there is a good deal more to be found out. You put this and that together very quickly, but failed to reason out all the points as well as you might have done."

"What have I left out? What more is there of it?"

"There may be more or less under it. There are clues that will need to be studied and followed up. For my part, I am not satisfied with Birkett's share of the business. It seems to me to be as queer as his performance in some other matters."

"What do you mean, Sam? Do you suspect—"

"We needn't suspect anything just now. It will be best to deal with facts as long as we have facts to go on. I said something could be done to satisfy your mind, and that is what must be done first. We will find Matt Grace, and we will make him tell us what has become of your wife."

Dick Herries was astonished.

The calm and confident tone of the young man concerning a problem which had been given up as unsolvable, quite bewildered him.

"You are too much for me, Slevin," he said. "You speak of finding Matt Grace as if you thought it an easy matter. How are we going to find him?"

"By going where he is."

"Where is he, then?"

"I happened to hear of him the other day. He was then at Rucker's Ford, somewhere down the Silver Bow. I don't know just where it is; but it can be found easily enough. I will go there and strike him, if you will let me."

"Not much, my boy. That is a bit of business which I ought to look after myself, and I shall be only too glad of the chance. But you may go with me if you will."

"All right, and we need not tell anybody where we are going, or what we are going for."

CHAPTER XXII.

"WHERE IS SHE?"

RUCKER'S FORD was one of those settlements which are frequently described, not with a profane intention, but with as little appropriateness of expression, as God-forsaken.

It was, in fact, an ex-settlement, rather than a settlement, being that most desolate of objects, a played-out camp.

In the palmy days of Rucker's Ford, much value had been extracted from the adjacent rocks and sands; but the pockets and leads had soon become exhausted, and the palmy days of the camp had passed away forever.

But there was one settler who could not be persuaded to abandon the pleasant (to him) but no longer fruitful spot where he had gained and kept many good dollars.

That settler was Joe Rucker himself, an old pioneer, who owned all the land about there, and the decaying remnants of personal property.

He had made a good thing of it, selling town lots, and keeping store during the palmy days of the camp, and when its prosperity departed, had got his land all back for little or nothing.

Perhaps he could not have sold out if he had wanted to; but he did not want to, as he had an excusable affection for a place which had panned out so well for him, though it had financially crippled so many.

Joe Rucker had a fine ranch there, which paid him reasonably well, and in addition to that, his house was a tavern for the entertainment of stray travelers.

He took in the strangers in more than one sense, when they had anything worth going for, and were inclined to cards; for old Joe was a noted poker-player, and was vain of his powers at that fascinating and truly American game.

Many were the sports, domestic and imported, good, bad and indifferent, who stopped at Rucker's Ford for no purpose but that of "tackling" old Joe at his favorite game.

Most of them went away sadly shorn, and Joe Rucker continued to devote much of his spare time to the study of schemes for the capture of the wily card sharp.

The latest siege of the stronghold was undertaken by Matt Grace.

This sport was well known by reputation to Joe Rucker, and on his arrival the old man prepared for a serious struggle.

A very tough and obstinate tussle it was, too. Matt Grace encamped before the citadel with all his forces, horse, foot and artillery, opened his trenches, and brought all his skill to bear, but with very faint effect.

At the end of a two weeks' siege he was only one hundred dollars ahead of the game, having won scarcely enough to settle his account for board and sundries.

This was terribly discouraging, and Grace determined to abandon the unprofitable field.

But before he went away he wanted to make a final attempt upon old Joe's dollars, and they sat down at night for another poker battle.

This game was as unsatisfactory as previous efforts had been, and both were getting tired of it when Grace dealt each of them a fairly good hand.

The betting began, but was not heavy, and Joe Rucker finally brought it to a close.

"You hain't been makin' a fortune at this here business, my boy," said he, "and I reckon we've fooled with it long enough. You are owin' me about a hundred dollars for board an' things. It might be a little more, an' it might be a little less; but we don't mind a few dollars. I'll see you to the size of that bill, and you ken call me, and then it'll be quits between us."

This arrangement was agreed to, and Grace put up his hundred, and in the show of hands he won the pot.

"Now you don't owe me a cent," said the old man, "and you ken slide out as soon as you want to. You've g'n me consid'able fun; but we've sized each other up mighty close, and it's nip and tuck between us, with only a chance to count against one or t'other. When a game gits down to dependin' on nothin' but luck, it ain't no use follerin' it up."

"You are too tough a subject for me to work on," replied Matt Grace. "I shall have to give you up as a bad job, and will leave here to-morrow."

They went to bed at a reasonably early hour, and both were up and out early in the morning, it being the intention of Grace to take a little walk before breakfast.

But Joe Rucker was ahead of his late antagonist, and had some interesting news for him.

"I reckon you needn't be in a hurry about goin' away, my boy," said he. "Thar's a good chance that you may be able to make somethin' more'n expenses here yet. A couple of strangers dropped in last night."

"Who are they?" inquired Grace.

"Dunno. Jimmy let 'em in an' took keer of 'em, and he didn't ax thar names. But he says that they looked as if they was well fixed. Now Matt, if they want a game, I shouldn't wonder if you and I could work together an' jest clean 'em out. We're a hull team, I reckon, the pair of us."

"All right," answered Grace. "We will size them up and judge how they will pan out."

He went on to take his walk, and had a pleasant stroll along the bank of the creek.

As he was returning, and had just come within sight of Joe Rucker's hostelry, he saw two men approaching him from that direction.

He rightly judged that they were the strangers of whom the old man had spoken, and was glad of a chance to make the acquaintance.

As they drew nearer he perceived to his surprise that he already knew them.

He was sure that one of them was Dick Herries, and he believed that he recognized the other as Sam Slevin.

He hastened forward to meet them, gladly expecting instant recognition and a cordial welcome.

His astonishment was almost beyond expression when Dick Herries, instead of responding to his friendly greeting, confronted him with a cocked revolver.

Grace reached for his own pistol; but Slevin was quicker than he, and he found himself covered by two deadly weapons in the hands of two skillful and determined men.

When a lively man of the world, who has been forced to endure life for two weeks in such a lonesome place as Rucker's Ford, and to carry on a lengthy and tedious contest with no substantial result, unexpectedly discovers two friends who have arrived from some quarter of

civilization, he may be justified in entertaining high anticipations of a joyful meeting.

When the fact is suddenly impressed upon him that those two friends have been transformed into deadly enemies, it is no wonder that the revulsion of feeling benumbs his faculties for the moment.

Such was the situation in which Matt Grace found himself, and it almost stunned him.

But he had judgment enough left to tell him that he had no means of extricating himself from his predicament, and that there was nothing for him to do but yield to surprise and superior force.

This conviction was confirmed by Dick Herries's peremptory order, given in stern tones, and accompanied by a look that clearly meant murder:

"Drop that shooter, and throw up your hands!"

The man who was in the minority complied at once with this demand:

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "You two are about the last men in the world from whom I would have looked for anything of this kind. What's your little game?"

"Your cheek is something that a man of your style may be proud of," replied Dick Herries. "You know what it means. I have an account to settle with you, and you know what it is."

"You have no account against me that I know of. Do you want to rob me, or do you want to kill me?"

"I don't know whether I shall kill you or not," coldly answered Herries. "If you give me the straight truth in answer to the questions I shall ask you, I may let you go."

"I am not in the habit of lying, Dick Herries, and you know it. Go on with your questions, and kill me if you want to. I don't care much about living, anyhow."

"If you do lie, I will drop on the lie quick enough, and it will be best for you to speak the plain truth. Answer me, now, if you want to live. Where is she?"

If ever astonishment was plainly depicted on a man's face, it was then visible in the countenance of Matt Grace.

"Where is she?" he repeated, staring blankly at his questioner. "Have you gone crazy? Where is who?"

"Where is my wife?" demanded Dick Herries.

"Where is your wife? Well, you are a ton or so too much for me now. How in the name of common sense should I know anything about your wife?"

"I will have no fooling about this, Matt Grace. What became of her after she ran away from Butte with you?"

"Ran away from Butte with me? What on earth does this mean? If your wife has ever left Butte, I know nothing about it."

Dick Herries's face grew darker, and he was evidently beside himself with rage.

"Heavens above us!" he exclaimed. "Shall I let the man face me down like that?"

"Perhaps you will," mildly remarked Sam Slevin as he lowered his revolver and stepped forward.

"Better go slow, Mr. Herries. It is more than possible that there is a mistake. Matt Grace is not in the habit of lying, as you know, and I don't believe he would tell a lie to save his life. It would never do to kill him for telling the truth. Suppose you wait to hear his side of story, and let me ask him a few questions."

"I only wish that somebody who has his wits about him would tell me what this performance means," said Grace.

Dick Herries subsided, and Silver Sam came to the front.

"You left Butte in a hurry, Matt," said he.

"That's true enough."

"And when Dick Herries was away."

"I believe he was, or I would have said good-by to him, as he was the only man there I cared for. But I got news that my wife was dangerously ill down in Kansas, and I was off like a shot."

"At the same time Dick Herries's wife disappeared, and he was led to believe that she had gone off with you."

Matt Grace looked greatly relieved, but at the same time greatly pained.

"I wish I had known this sooner," he said, "and I would have hunted him up and done my best to get that belief out of his head. But I never had the least idea that such a thought had got hold of him. If he still believes it, let him kill me where I stand. If I believed that I could be that mean, I would kill myself."

"I believe it no longer," interposed Herries. "You speak like a man who is telling the square truth."

"I have my bad points, Dick Herries, but lying is not one them. I admired your wife and daughter, and they were a great comfort to me while I was in Butte; but what we mostly talked about was my own wife, who had been a great sufferer. She is dead now, poor soul, and that is what made me say just now that I did not care about living. She was ready for the grave when I reached her."

"I am sorry that I thought so badly of you,

Matt," said Dick Herries, as he extended his hand to his old friend. "But I was terribly worked up about it, and the loss of my wife is more of a mystery to me now than ever. As she did not go away with Grace, Sam Slevin, how did she go, and where is she?"

"That is a question," replied Sam, "which we must take hold of at some future time."

Old Joe Rucker had his poker game that night; but Dick Herries and Matt Grace were the men who played it with him, and he was relieved of the burden of many of his dollars.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"BETTER BURY YOUR DEAD."

THE discovery of the body of Jim Boggs in the canyon below Stephen Boreman's ranch raised a far greater excitement in Butte and the region round about than such a circumstance might have been expected to create.

Bodies of men who had met their death by murder or otherwise were frequently found in that vicinity, and not a few of them in the main street of Butte; but seldom had a discovery of the kind caused so much talk as the finding of Jim Boggs's body.

This unusual state of affairs was mainly due to two facts.

In the first place, a brother of Jim Boggs had recently arrived in the camp on a special errand.

Secondly, he had formed the intimate acquaintance of Andrew Birkett.

The brother of the dead man, Abner Boggs by name, was a middle-aged man who was not noticeable for brightness, but was possessed of a strong appetite for money.

He had been brought from his Illinois home by a letter from Jim Boggs, which he was free in showing or reading to all who cared to see or hear it.

This is the letter which Andrew Birkett read, and every word of which he remembered.

"DEAR BIRKETT:

"I want you to come out here in the spring. Come early, so as to reach Butte not later than the middle of April. I have got a good thing, and want you to share it and help me. I and my partner, Angus Dameron, struck a rich lead late in the fall. But we knew that winter would soon be coming on, and we could not touch it then. So we are going to go into camp and build a cabin for ourselves, where we will stay until spring begins. Then we will open out our find, and I don't doubt that it will be a big thing.

"We have saved quite a pile, and mean to keep it safe for business. But it may not be enough, and if you have any money or can borrow any, bring it along. If you have to borrow, you will be safe in promising to pay in six months with big interest; for I know a good thing when I see it.

"When you get to Butte, inquire for Indian Bill's Hole. Somebody there will know the place, I reckon. If not, you can get onto it by asking at Steve Boreman's ranch, a few miles below Butte.

"Give my love to Sarah and the children, and tell them that we are going to make them all rich. I only wish that mother was alive, so that she could share my prosperity when it comes.

"Bring as much money as you can. We will have use for all you can raise.

"Your affectionate brother,

"JAMES H. BOGGS."

The man who wrote the letter, and who was at the time of writing it full of such pleasant anticipations of profit, lay dead in the canyon known as Indian Bill's Hole.

Abner Boggs, who was also stirred up by the prospect of profit, reached Butte before the middle of April, and at once began to look for his brother.

Being a free-spoken man, he made known his business to all who cared to hear of it.

Andrew Birkett, scenting a chance to get hold of somebody else's money or a share in somebody else's mine, showed Abner Boggs all possible attentions, and became his most intimate friend.

He was acquainted with the location of Indian Bill's Hole, and he it was who proposed to accompany Abner Boggs thither and to assist him in his search for his brother.

They set out as soon after the arrival of the Illinois man as the weather would permit, and Josh Cattermole went with them as a guide and general helper.

They easily found the canyon, and passed inward and upward until they reached the cabin which had been erected by Angus Dameron and Jim Boggs.

It was a sad and dilapidated looking object, the snow that had drifted over it, and that which had melted above and about it having nearly destroyed it for residence purposes, and rendered it very unsightly.

"We are not likely to find anybody here," observed Birkett, as they approached the cabin. "Your brother and his partner must have moved out and gone away."

"I suppose so," answered Abner Boggs. "But it's a great pity. I won't know where to look for them now."

"It's a safe guess that they have gone to look after their mine. But as likely as not they have left some direction for you in the shebang, and we will go in and look for it."

A few steps further, and they were astonished.

Their astonishment amounted to consternation.

The cabin was in a sheltered spot where the rays of the sun scarcely penetrated.

Consequently there were drifts near it that had not yet entirely melted away—dirty heaps of snow which seemed to have been forgotten by the springtime.

From under one of these heaps protruded a pair of boots which contained the feet of a corpse.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Boggs," said Andrew Birkett, "that this business is worse than we had thought it. Instead of moving away, your friends may have died here—if they have not been murdered here."

Murder it was, as the point was soon settled in the minds of the three searchers.

A brief investigation soon convinced Abner Boggs that the body was that of his brother.

It had been badly treated by time and the weather, though the birds and beasts of prey had not worried it, and the features were not in a condition to be recognized; but there were sufficient proofs in and upon the clothing of the identity of the corpse with Jim Boggs.

Had he died a natural death where he was found?

It was not likely that he would have perished under that pile of snow when the cabin was so near at hand, and the cause of his death must be more closely inquired into.

There was enough of the flesh and skin of the head to show a bullet hole penetrating the brain, and the manner of the dead man's taking off was easily apparent.

The grief of Abner Boggs was great and genuine; but he soon recovered from it, and proceeded to consider the calamity in a business way.

"My brother has been murdered," said he. "It must have been by robbers. If so, they have killed his partner and taken the money."

"Quite likely," answered Birkett; "but it is not a sure thing yet. We will go inside and see what we can find there."

In the cabin they found another surprise, scarcely less astonishing than what they had discovered outside.

There was no person there.

Of course they had not expected to find any living person; but there was not even a corpse.

The rude tenement was deserted, but not dismantled.

All life had gone out of it, but the inanimate things—the few and cheap articles of household necessity and comfort—were still there.

Even the bed had not been touched since it was last slept in.

But there was something on the floor that told of a tragedy.

Plentiful stains of blood were there, and they were scattered over the rough planks in a tell-tale trail to the door.

It could hardly be doubted that Jim Boggs had been killed there, and that his body had been dragged outside and hidden under the snow.

His murderer or murderers had not even taken the trouble to efface the bloody evidence of the crime.

This much was clear to Andrew Birkett and Josh Cattermole, and Abner Boggs, after a full consideration of the visible surroundings, coincided with their opinions.

A careful examination of the cabin resulted in the discovery of no money or anything of value.

But who was the murderer, and for what purpose had the man been killed?

Abner Birkett reasoned this matter out to his own satisfaction.

"Your brother is here dead, Mr. Boggs," said he, "and his partner has gone away, no doubt of his own accord. As the money is also missing, it probably went with him. So it is pretty safe to conclude that Mr. Angus Dameron killed his partner with the object of securing a double share of the mine and the money. But, if I had been here to advise him how to work the scheme I know what I would have told him."

"What is that?" inquired Boggs.

"Better bury your dead. That is the advice I would have given him. He has left things here a little too plain, and the evidence against him is so clear that it looks as if he may lose what he's got. The question is now, where will we go to look for him?"

"I reckon I can settle that pint," observed Josh Cattermole. "If I ain't greatly mistaken, Dameron is the name of the man who is Dick Herries's partner in the big find at Whitewood Canyon."

Andrew Birkett's astonishment at this statement was only equalled by his delight.

He made no attempt to conceal the gratification it gave him.

"That's a big thing," he exclaimed. "Now we can guess how that rascal made the rich strike he was bragging of. There were two of them in the murder, and the only question is which was the worst. It will be queer if I don't get a hold on Dick Herries that will be enough to hang him. We will hunt them down, Mr. Boggs—be sure of that—and you shall have plenty of satisfaction."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL.

BEFORE leaving the cabin in Indian Bill's

Hole, the searchers disposed of the body of Jim Boggs.

They did not bury it, as they had another purpose in view which was suggested and explained by Andrew Birkett.

He proposed, with an eye to subsequent proceedings, that they should make sure of having the lay—such as it was—on their side.

The body, therefore, was carried into the cabin, laid on the bed, and covered from view.

Then the tenement was closed and fastened as securely as possible, in order to prevent intrusion.

The next move of the men who were seeking vengeance in the name of justice was a visit to Stephen Boreman's ranch, at which they had not called on their way down to Indian Bill's Hole.

"Leave all the talk to me, boys," Andrew Birkett said to his companions. "Give me a fair chance, and I will squeeze the truth out of everybody who knows anything about this business, and you may be plum sure that justice will be done."

Stephen Boreman was no longer at the ranch, and his absence was explained by the man in charge there, a thrifty German named Kruger.

Kruger had formerly been employed on the place, and had taken it at a low rent on Stephen Boreman's departure.

His former employer, he stated, declaring that there was no secrecy about the matter, had gone to Whitewood Canyon with Dick Herries and a man named Dameron, to take a job in a mine which they were about to open down there.

Andrew Birkett winked at his companions when this fact came out, as if to assure them that he would soon be able to connect the murderers closely with the murdered man.

He proceeded to question the honest German, leading up to the points he wanted to make with the astuteness of a criminal lawyer.

Kruger stood this until he became confused and grew suspicious.

Then he declared himself unable to understand that sort of thing, but professed his willingness to tell the story in his own way, if he could be permitted to do so without being interrupted.

Birkett was obliged to submit to these conditions, and the German gave his account of the matter pretty clearly.

It was in the depth of winter, he said, that Dick Herries first came to the ranch. He was then nearly dead with cold and exhaustion, and Stephen Boreman took him in, thawed him out, fed him, and cared for him generally.

The next morning he went away, and he and Stephen Boreman were the best of friends.

He started down the creek, having previously declared his intention of crossing the range by way of Indian Bill's Hole.

Between two and three weeks after that event, continued Kruger, Dick Herries came back to the ranch, accompanied by the man named Dameron.

Herries was then in good condition physically, and in fine spirits; but Dameron was very thin and pale and weak, looking as if he had been suffering from a long and severe fit of sickness.

In fact, Kruger heard several allusions to his illness, and his desire to get to some settlement where he could have good medical attendance.

They remained at the ranch about a day and a half, and then Stephen Boreman got up a team and drove them away, Dameron being well wrapped up, and made as comfortable as possible.

Mr. Boreman left the ranch in charge of Kruger, telling him that he might be away for a week or so.

Nearly three weeks had passed when he got back, and on his return he began to make arrangements for going away to stay.

His friends Herries and Dameron, he said, were about to open a new mine at a place known as Whitewood Canyon.

The promise of the mine was very good, and they had plenty of money to start with, and his son Dave was to be the foreman, and they had offered himself a position that would be both pleasant and profitable.

He rented the ranch to Kruger, and went away with his team as soon as spring began to open, carrying a considerable portion of his household goods, and that was all the German knew about the matter.

This was all-important information; but it did not go far enough.

Andrew Birkett was not satisfied, and he proceeded to question the German more closely.

Had Herries or Dameron while they were at the ranch said anything about a dead man, or made any allusion to a person named Boggs?

Kruger remembered, when his attention was called to this point, that he had heard something of the sort.

When Herries and Dameron were together he had happened to hear them speak of a man who had been killed.

Dameron said that it was a pity that the dead man could not have been put under the ground, but Herries spoke as if that was a matter of no particular consequence.

Did they say anything that could give a hint

as to whether either of them had killed the man?

Yes—from the way they both spoke, Kruger judged that Herries was the one who had done the killing.

It was not to be supposed that such a weak and sickly man as Dameron would have killed a man.

But the German declared that he had not cared to take any notice of such a little thing as that.

Had they, or either of them, spoken of the dead man in the presence of Stephen Boreman?

Not to the knowledge of Kruger.

Had Stephen Boreman mentioned the matter to Kruger after his return or at any other time?

He had not said a word about it.

This was all the information that could be got out of the German.

But Andrew Birkett assured his companions, as he returned with them to Butte, that it was sufficient for their purposes.

"It is certain, Mr. Boggs," said he, "that Dick Herries killed your brother, and it stands to reason that he killed him for the sake of getting his money and his share of the mine."

"Perhaps the man Dameron may have prompted the murder or agreed to it, though it is possible that he may have been bulldozed by that rascal Herries, and compelled to come under."

"We can only guess how that happened; but we are sure of enough to give justice a fair show."

"We know where the murderer is, and have got enough evidence to hang him."

"We know where the mine is, and there is law enough in the Territory to give you your rights there."

Andrew Birkett, with the full consent and confidence of Abner Boggs, took charge of the business of bringing to justice the murderer of Jim Boggs, and securing to Abner the property of his dead brother.

There could be no doubt that the latter part of the business would be easy enough to attend to after the former should have been transacted.

After the conviction and execution of the murderer, the property would be restored to its rightful owner as a matter of course.

The excitement that followed the discovery of the body of Jim Boggs, was largely due to the efforts of Andrew Birkett, who soon had public sentiment where he wanted it.

Then he proceeded rapidly with the arrangements that were to result in the hanging of Dick Herries.

A convenient magistrate gladly consented to impanel a convenient jury of inquest, and to go to Indian Bill's Hole for the purpose of viewing the body of the murdered man.

It was a jolly party that went down there, and the semi-judicial proceeding was a picnic occasion which was not soon forgotten by the participants.

Liquors and cigars for the trip were freely furnished by Andrew Birkett, whose liberality in behalf of the cause of justice and of a defrauded fellow-citizen were extensively eulogized by Abner Boggs.

After the jury had viewed the body they buried it decently and went up to Stephen Boreman's ranch, where the picnic expanded into a grand jollification, not altogether unconnected with the taking of evidence.

Andrew Birkett and Abner Boggs gave the particulars connected with the finding of the body, and the former related how Dick Herries, after having been driven away from Butte in the dead of winter without a dollar, showed up there in the early spring with his pockets full of money.

But he neglected to explain how it was that the accused man largely increased his capital before he left the camp a second time.

Then Stephen Boreman's German tenant was compelled, somewhat against his will, to repeat the story which he had told to Boggs and Birkett, and the close questioning of the latter made it bear as strongly as possible against Dick Herries.

The case was clear enough, anyhow, and liquor flowed freely, and there was nothing the matter with the jury.

The verdict, which was virtually framed by Andrew Birkett, was one of willful murder against Dick Herries, with Angus Dameron as an accessory.

After the inquest the party returned to Butte, and the picnic was wound up with a great carouse.

"We have got that rascal just where we want him now," said Andrew Birkett to his new friend.

"If we can take him," suggested the friend.

"That will be easy enough, with a legal warrant and plenty of men to form a posse."

CHAPTER XXV.

STARTING A NEW SUSPICION.

DICK HERRIES and Sam Slevin rode back together from Rucker's Ford to Whitewood.

Their state of mind, and especially that of Herries, had not been noticeably improved by the results of the expedition.

Angus Dameron's partner was so astounded and bewildered that he was obliged to admit that he could not arrange his ideas in his head so that they would be of any use to him.

He believed the assurances that Matt Grace had given him.

He could not help believing them, as they were so strongly supported by the manner of the man and his reputation for truth.

But Dick Herries had for so long a time cherished and nursed the opposite belief, that he was in a manner dazed, and all his calculations and intentions were upset.

If his wife had not left Butte in the company of Matt Grace, with whom had she gone away?

In other words, what had become of her?

He went over this matter in a wandering way so constantly, and repeated the same questions so frequently, Slevin was obliged to make an effort to satisfy him and settle his mind.

The only chance to do that was to start his suspicions in a new direction, and that might not be an easy thing to do, as his friend had nothing more than a very vague suspicion to go on.

"She did not go away with Grace, Mr. Herries," said he. "I am as sure of that as I am that I live. Do we have to suppose, then, that she went away with anybody?"

"Why, Sam, do you mean to say that she could have gone of her own accord and alone? Well, I don't know but you may be right about it. If I could believe for so long a time that she had eloped with a man, why should I not suppose now that she went alone?"

"That is not exactly the point that I am willing to make, Mr. Herries. It is certain that she disappeared as suddenly and utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed her, and it is quite possible that the mystery of her disappearance is deeper than anything we have yet touched."

"I don't see what you are trying to get at."

"Suppose that she did not go of her own free will, but was enticed or forced away by an enemy."

"What sort of an enemy?"

"An enemy of hers or yours—more likely yours."

"And who would that be?"

"You have had but one enemy that I know of—one who was a sneaking enemy while he professed to be a friend."

"Andrew Birkett?"

"That's the man I mean. You know he is proved to have been your enemy while you believed him to be your friend. It was he, as you told me, who first caused you to suspect your wife, and then convinced you that she had gone away with Matt Grace. Is it not reasonable to suppose that he may have put you on a false trail for the purpose of hiding his own tracks?"

"But my wife disliked that man, and often warned me against him. She really detested him. It is impossible that she should have gone away with him."

"Quite unlikely that she should have gone of her own accord, I admit, but likely enough that he may have enticed or forced her away."

"But why should he have done such a thing?" demanded Dick Herries. "What was the motive?"

"It is easy to find reasons and motives when we once begin to suspect. Perhaps he was afraid of her influence over you, and wanted to put her out of the way so that he could get you in his clutches. Perhaps he believed that his scheme would have just the effect upon you that it did have. You know that he got hold of your property and drove you away from Butte. Perhaps he wanted to get rid of both your wife and yourself, so that Kate might fall into his power. We know what the scoundrel meant to do last winter, and he might have succeeded if I had not been lucky enough to turn up and foil him."

"There is a great deal in what you say, Sam. I had not looked at it in that light before. How do you suppose he put my wife out of the way? Is it possible that he killed her?"

"Possible, of course, though I don't believe he would commit a murder if he could serve his purpose without it. But I want to say, Mr. Herries, that I have nothing but a suspicion, and my suspicion goes no further than the fact that I believe the man to be mean enough for such a deed. I have good reason to know that he is a scoundrel, as he is engaged in a villainous scheme outside of your affairs which has put me on his trail. He has baffled me in that so far: but I shall be very much mistaken in myself if I fail to head him off."

Nothing was said about the matter during the remainder of the journey, and after their arrival at Whitewood neither of the men mentioned it to Kate Herries, who was allowed to suppose that the expedition had been one of business merely.

Dick Herries was very gloomy the next morning, but as the day advanced he began to brighten up, and in the afternoon he was almost radiant.

He had gained a new hope, which he proceeded to explain to Slevin.

"The belief is gradually coming over me, my boy," he said, "that your suspicion about An-

drew Birkett may be right. The more I think of it, the more strongly I am inclined to that opinion."

"I see no more reason for it than I saw then," replied Slevin; "but I do think that if the truth could be squeezed out of that scoundrel we would know more than we do now about the fate of Mrs. Herries."

"That is what I believe, and my belief has gone further and has done me a great deal of good. It broke me up, as you know, when I was convinced that she had run off with Matt Grace; but I have got rid of that notion now. Any belief would be better than that."

"Even the belief that she is dead," suggested Sam.

"A great deal better. But I am beginning to cherish a pretty strong hope that she may yet be alive. I feel sure now that she did not run away with anybody, or leave me of her own accord. If she was enticed or forced away, as you suggest, by that man Birkett, he had a purpose to serve which we may not have guessed at. Whatever that purpose may have been, it is likely that he would serve it better by keeping her out of sight for a while than by finishing her."

"That is my opinion," said Sam.

"Perhaps he has wanted her to do something, or to use her as a decoy for getting Kate into his clutches. Perhaps— But there's no use in talking about perhappes. I feel now as if I could kill the wretch on sight."

"That would never do, Mr. Herries. I have no cause to kill him, if anybody has; but that is the last thing I would think of. We would never get anything out of him by killing him, and what we want, if my suspicion should prove to be correct, is to squeeze the truth out of him."

"That's the point, Sam. We must get a hold on him in some way; but I can't think how it is to be done."

"Let me try my hand before you make any move in the matter. I have to look after the business I mentioned to you the other day; and would have attended to it before now if I had not had the pleasanter task of bringing your daughter to Whitewood. Now that you and Kate are safe and comfortable here, I will look around and see what I can pick up. If I can get the grip on Andrew Birkett that I hope to get, there will be some tough squeezing done before he goes loose."

"I wish I could go with you," said Dick Herries. "But to-morrow will be a busy day here, and Dameron is not able to get about and attend to things, and it is important that I should be on hand."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOU ARE MY PRISONER."

"Now that you and Kate are safe and comfortable here."

That was what Sam Slevin had said to Kate Herries's father, and no doubt he believed the statement to be true, and rejoiced in its truth.

It was natural that he should believe it, as they were there on their own ground, surrounded by people who were supposed to be their friends and were in a manner dependent upon them, and there was no visible cloud to threaten existence at Whitewood.

But a cloud was rising without their knowledge, and was soon to burst over their heads.

Slevin left the camp the next morning, but did not hurry away, waiting until he had eaten his breakfast, and taking time to say a very affectionate farewell to Kate Herries.

He was well-mounted, well-armed, and well-provisioned for a journey, and the sun was shining brightly, and the air was delightfully mild and balmy.

His last good-by was to Pat Murphy, the proprietor and autocrat of the Shamrock Saloon in Whitewood, who directed him to a trail that led into the hills, by which he might make a short cut to the point he wished to reach.

It was but a little while after his departure that events began to develop which caused uneasiness to more than one person in the camp.

The day promised to be a busy one, as Dick Herries had predicted.

Several men met at Whitewood by previous appointment or arrangement, some of them coming from a considerable distance.

They were mostly "boss" miners, speculators, and contractors in one way or another for supplies or work, the business of each being more or less closely connected with the mine, and all of them being anxious to ascertain how the new find was working and how it was likely to pan out.

Some of them had reached the camp the evening before Sam Slevin went away, and the others arrived the next morning.

At the same time—that is to say, during the morning—arrived a number of other men, who were not apparently connected with those who have been mentioned, and whose business there shortly became a subject of speculation.

They did not come in a body, but straggled into camp singly, or by twos or threes, as if they had merely happened around.

But they also happened to find each other easily enough, and they flocked together pretty freely after their arrival.

It might have been noticed, though these points were not peculiar to them, that they were rather rough-looking specimens, and that they were well supplied with deadly weapons.

As it was a good day for strangers in Whitewood, this collection might not have attracted special attention, had not the fact become apparent to suspicious observers that they were not to be associated with the business visitors who had been expected.

The latter were marshaled in a body by Dick Herries, and were taken to the mine, where all the hands were at work, and where they were to be allowed to freely inspect the progress that had been made and the character and quantity of the output.

On this inspection would largely depend the credit of the mine, to say nothing of offers to "buy in" which the owners would not be likely to accept.

The stragglers, however, did not go up to the mine, but gathered themselves together in knots, and infested the Shamrock Saloon, or drank whisky from the private bottles with which they were well supplied.

Under the influence of the liquor which they paid for and that which they did not pay for, they soon began to swagger and bluster, exciting among the few remaining citizens of Whitewood apprehensions of an intention to "run the town."

One of those who had noticed them particularly, and had been rendered uneasy by their presence and performances, was Pat Murphy, the proprietor of the Shamrock.

Pat was a great admirer of Dick Herries, and it was partly because of something that he had overheard concerning the mine-owner that he became troubled.

Leaving his saloon in charge of his barkeeper, he sallied out to impart his suspicions to Stephen Boreman.

David Boreman was at the mine with Dick Herries and the visitors; but his father, after attending to some business in the camp, had remained to watch the behavior of the strangers there.

"That is just what I was thinkin' of," remarked Stephen, when the Irishman spoke to him about the number and the mysterious conduct of the new-comers.

"I was wonderin' who they are, whar they come from, and what they are here for."

"Yez may bet yer swate life that it's fur no good," said Pat. "Av coorse, they hain't got nothing to do wid the men at the mine."

"Nothin' to do with any of us, I should say, unless it is to rob somebody."

"That's it, me lad. They're a murtherin' set ov vill'ins to look at, and w'u'd as soon kill us all and rob the camp as take a drink av whisky, an' they're ready enough at that, more be token that they've brought their own bottles, bad 'cess to 'em!"

"Like enough they do mean to jump on us, Pat, and I reckon I had better go around quietly and put the boys on their guard."

"So do I, Misther Boreman. But that ain't all they're aftber, I'm thinkin'. They do be meanin' some sort of harrum to Misther Herries. There's wan av thim that's kept hisself in my place stuck back in a corner as if he wanted to hide, an' he's the chafe av the gang, sor, and the others come to him and whisper as if they was gettin' ordhers. And I heard wan av thim spake the boss's name, and he was sayin' that the men who had gone up to the mine might be in the way. And thin the chafe said that they'd got to take him anyhow."

"That looks bad," said Stephen Boreman, as a frown settled on his dark face.

"It does indade, sor. I wish that Sam Slevin was here the now."

"Has he left the camp?"

"He wint off this mornin', sor, expectin' to be several days away; but it's only an hour or so since he slid out."

"Which way did he go?"

"By the valley trail to the north that lades up into the hills."

"There's a smart boy at Danny Dowd's, Pat, and I will put him on a fast horse and send him after Mr. Slevin right away. You and the rest of the boys at the camp had better keep yourselves well heeled and look out for the lightnin'. I will keep my eye open, too, and will pass the word around at the mine."

The visitors finished their inspection of the mine, and came straggling back to the camp to compare notes and make their offers or contracts.

Among the last to come out of the canyon were Dick Herries and Stephen Boreman, and with them was Matt Grace, who had swooped upon Whitewood like an eagle from a cliff, desirous of proving his friendship for Dick Herries, and possibly wishing to look after business chances in his line.

Stephen Boreman had hastened to acquaint his son with his suspicions, and, as he said to Pat Murphy, to pass the word around at the mine.

The consequence was that as soon as the managing partner and the visitors had gone away, Dave Boreman told the men that they might knock off for the remainder of the day.

It was generally understood among them that the knocking off might be a prelude to a job of knocking out.

Shortly they began to straggle out of the canyon, not in a body or with any visible attempt at organization, but casually and as if seeking their homes.

Yet most of them were armed, and the rest could easily get hold of their weapons in case of need.

"Thar's another lot of strangers about, Mr. Herries," said Stephen Boreman, as they approached the camp, "and they look and act as if they mean mischief. Pat Murphy has been watchin' 'em, and he's got the same notion."

"What do you and Pat think they want to do?" inquired Dick Herries.

"He thinks they arg arter you, as he has heerd 'em speak of you and talk about takin' you. Maybe, now, you had better kinder sidle around and keep out of their way."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I don't know why anybody should come here after me; but they shall have a chance at me if they want it."

At the same time it was natural that he should think of Andrew Birkett and his enmity.

If he did, it was only to hope that he might meet that prominent citizen and settle another score with him.

Stephen Boreman perceived that it would be useless to argue the point with an obstinate man; but he called Dick Herries's attention to a group of men who were standing near the Shamrock Saloon.

"Thar's some of 'em," said he, "and I make no doubt that thar's plenty more handy."

"I see no occasion for a scare," remarked Matt Grace. "Dick Herries must have friends enough about here to stand by him, and I notice that some men from the mine have been following us down the canyon."

Doubtless the strangers, whatever their purpose might be, had not cared to "tackle" so important a person as Dick Herries when he was at the mine among his own people, preferring to wait until they could get him at a better advantage.

But they also could see the mine hands coming away from work, and the sight was not calculated to inspire them with a high degree of confidence in their undertaking.

But it was to be carried through at all hazards, according to the order of their leader as overheard by Pat Murphy, and they were there awaiting the return of Dick Herries from the mine.

As he drew near them they moved so as to block his way.

But he advanced steadily with his friends, until he was close upon them.

Then a tall man stepped forward from the group.

In his left hand he had a folded paper, and

he laid his right hand on the shoulder of the mine-owner.

"You are my prisoner," said he.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THAT MAN IS DEAD."

DICK HERRIES recognized the man who addressed him, as Hank Dormley, otherwise known as Hank the Hellion, one of the roughest and most desperate characters of the neighborhood of Butte.

There were other faces and figures in the group that were more or less familiar to him.

There could be no doubt that such men, so gathered together, and beginning their work in that style, meant mischief, and he began to have an inkling of the nature of the mischief they meant.

He looked around for Andrew Birkett, who might reasonably be supposed to be connected with the scheme, but saw nothing of that prominent citizen.

"What's that you say?" he sharply demanded, as he impatiently shook off the ruffian's big hand.

"You are my prisoner," repeated Hank the Hellion.

"I don't think I am. What do you mean by this foolishness?"

"It ain't no sort o' foolishness, Dick Herries, and you'd better give in without any fuss. We mean business, we do."

Herries stepped back a pace or two.

He had no doubt that the men who confronted him did mean business, and he was strongly inclined to believe that he meant business, too.

"What sort of business do you mean, then?" he demanded. "What right have you to make me a prisoner, and what am I accused of?"

"This here is a warrant," promptly answered Hank Dormley, "and we are goin' to take you for the murder of Jim Boggs."

The situation was becoming serious.

Reinforcements were at hand for each party.

Just then Andrew Birkett came hurrying out of the Shamrock Saloon, followed by some more of the strangers who had incurred the suspicions of Pat Murphy.

The proprietor of the Shamrock and his barkeeper followed them out.

At the same time Dave Boreman was hurrying to the scene with some of the men of the mine, and more were in sight.

It was doubtless the wide-awake condition of Whitewood that prompted Andrew Birkett to emerge from his hiding-place and take an active part in the proceedings.

It was evidently necessary that if his enterprise was to be successful, he should put in his word without any further delay.

"That's the charge!" he shouted as he ran to join his friends. "The murder of Jim Boggs!"

Dick Herries actually laughed.

His joy at finding himself face to face with his enemy, overcame for the moment all other considerations.

"You are there, then?" he exclaimed. "I thought it would be queer if you hadn't a hand in this game."

"Yes, I'm here with the rest," replied the prominent citizen, "and we are a sheriff's posse, and our orders are to take you, dead or alive."

The posse presented a formidable appearance just then.

In numbers, in arms, and in organization, they seemed to be fully able to "take the town," or at least to carry one man out of the camp.

"I'm all alive just now," said Herries, "and you will find me pretty lively before you get through with me. I've got to see what your little game means before I chip in."

"Take him, boys!" shouted Birkett. "Serve your warrant, Hank, and take your prisoner!"

The clicking of pistols was ominous just then, and the situation was becoming yet more serious.

Dave Boreman had arrived with his men from the mine, and had been joined by Pat Murphy and his barkeeper, and other citizens of Whitewood were coming forward.

Moreover, the visitors who had been inspecting the mine, attracted by the crowd and the excitement, came flocking to the scene.

Dave Boreman and his father, with several of their followers, hastened to range themselves in front of Dick Herries, and things looked ugly enough.

But Matt Grace stepped forward between the two parties, and immediately made himself the central figure of the occasion.

In his right hand he held a bright and handsome revolver, and toyed with it and patted it gently as he spoke.

His gaze was directed rather piercingly at Andrew Birkett, but his words were uttered in a slow and drawling tone, as if he considered himself the boss of the business and was in no hurry to settle it.

"But go slow," said he. "This is a nice little picnic, and I reckon you will get a heap of fun out of it. But you don't want to hurry through life. Better straighten out the business end first, and that warrant, as you call it, means business. Let us look at it."

Hank Dormley, somewhat taken aback by the young man's cool and overbearing style, gave him the paper.

He merely glanced at it and handed it back.

"That's no good," he said. "A warrant from a justice of the peace up in Lodge county is no better than a bit of waste paper down here. You will have to show something better than that."

"We've got enough to show to take our man," angrily interjected Andrew Birkett.

"Have you? That sounds like war talk, and surely, my beloved brethren, you don't want war. Not yet, I hope. This is a new camp, and the folks have not started a graveyard yet. Wait till they get a nice little cemetery laid out on the slope yonder, and the lots ready for market. Then there will be an auction sale, and the camp will be ready for business. But you don't want to hurry things up."

It was clear that Matt Grace was talking to gain time for more reinforcements to arrive, and it was also clear that every minute he gained increased the chances of Dick Herries's friends.

If Andrew Birkett wanted to seize the mine-owner by a *coup de main*, the precious moments were passing too rapidly.

But he could not afford to fight unless his point could not be carried without fighting, nor even then unless a fight should be forced upon him.

It must be admitted that he was a little irresolute, and that his followers were not disposed to admire his dallying style of doing business.

But he had taken considerable pains to gain a reputation, if not for probity, at least for respectability, and he was not inclined to peril it by engaging in a conflict whose results might be unsatisfactory.

Sure that he had the law on his side, he believed that he must succeed in his object, though circumstances had unexpectedly turned against him.

An opportunity for a peaceful solution of the difficulty presented itself.

One of the visitors to the mine stepped to the front.

This was Ben Ripley, of Bannack, a tall and portly middle-aged man, one of the biggest "operators" in that region, and a man whose character as well as his personal appearance commanded respect.

"Matt Grace is right," said he. "You don't want to start any funeral here, and it is hard to say whose funeral it might be if the game should begin. If you folks have the law on your side, the law must be respected. But I agree with Matt that a paper from some justice of the peace up about Butte don't seem to fill the bill."

"We only want to take the man to be tried," said Andrew Birkett, "and he shall have a fair trial."

"Now you are talking sense," observed Matt Grace, "and I will tell you what seems to me to be the fair thing for all hands. Here's a lot of men, strangers to Whitewood, all good and solid citizens, who have no interest in this matter, and who are apt to be found on the side of law and order. Let them form a court right here, with Ben Ripley at the head of it. Then you can swing out your evidence, and if it's good enough to take the pot they will see to it that Dick Herries goes with you and stands a regular trial."

"That's about the ticket," said Ripley. "It seems to me that all parties can pool their chips on that basis."

Andrew Birkett loudly declared that he had evidence enough to satisfy any reasonable man or set of men.

"We've got the verdict of a fair and square coroner's jury," said he, "charging Dick Herries and Angus Dameron with the murder of Jim Boggs at Indian Bill's Hole last winter."

Dick Herries came forward to speak for himself.

"This matter can be settled peaceably and easily," said he, "unless those men from Butte want to try to bulldoze somebody. I admit that I killed the man; but I killed him in self-defense. He was about to murder a sick man, when I happened to drop in just in time to prevent it. Then he turned upon me, and would have killed me if I had not shot him down. I can prove this by my partner, Angus Dameron, if he is well enough to give in his evidence."

"That scheme won't work," sneered Birkett. "He was accused by the coroner's jury, too, and is as deep in the mud as you are. I sent a couple of men to arrest him; but they are making a long job of it."

Dick Herries was startled and angered by this statement.

"What's that you say?" he demanded. "You sent men to arrest Angus Dameron and charge him with murder? Why, he is too weak to stand, and the shock may be the death of him."

"That's another scheme that won't work," replied Birkett. "You wanted to get hold of him first and fix up a yarn, I reckon; but I've blocked your game. Here come the men I sent after him."

They had just crossed the creek, and were rapidly approaching the scene of excitement; but it was evident from the manner of their coming that they would introduce a new element into the controversy.

There was no third man with them. If they had found Angus Dameron, they had not been able to bring him away from his sick bed.

As they came they were watched by the entire crowd, and the interest of all was for the moment concentrated upon them and the news they brought.

They were rough-looking men, and the expression of their faces was that of sullenness and disappointment; but they said nothing until they had forced their way into the throng and joined their leader.

"What's up?" demanded Andrew Birkett. "Where is that man you went for? Didn't you arrest him?"

"Not much," answered one of the men.

"Why not? If there's anything the matter, spit it out. Where is that man?"

"That man is dead!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A HORSE AND A MAN.

"THAT man is dead!"

The announcement of Angus Dameron's death, such a sudden commentary upon the recent words of the man who was accused with him, was stunning to most of those present, and for a moment was followed by silence.

The two principal parties of the as yet unsettled controversy were especially affected by it, but in different ways.

When Andrew Birkett heard Dick Herries declare that he could prove by his partner that the killing of Jim Boggs was in self-defense, it was easy for him to jump to the conclusion that no other evidence to that effect could be adduced.

When Herries went on to say that an attempt to arrest Angus Dameron might give him a shock that would cause his death, it was natural that the prominent citizen of Butte should wish that the words of his enemy might come true.

They had come true, so soon after they were spoken.

The only evidence for the accused had been destroyed by death, and what was to hinder Mr. Andrew Birkett from having his own way?

The situation suited him so well that he could scarcely conceal his satisfaction.

Dick Herries, on the contrary, was touched to the heart by the death of his partner.

He had grown to love Angus Dameron for good and sufficient reasons.

His partner had lovable and sterling qualities which were calculated to endear him to any real man, and it was through him that good fortune had come to the battered and weary outcast.

Moreover, Dameron had lately been feeble of body and largely dependent upon him, and that condition naturally begets affection for one whom we can care for at all.

That such an unexpected and brutal blow should have suddenly caused the death of this dear friend was a terrible stroke to Dick Herries.

For the moment he was stunned, but anger flamed up in his breast and filled him with life.

It is probable that he did not then give a thought to the important fact that the death of Dameron had deprived him of his only evidence, so absorbed was he by a consuming rage.

His wrath burst forth in fierce and bitter words that were calculated to turn the controversy into a quarrel and provoke bloodshed.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he shouted, his eyes blazing as he faced Andrew Birkett. "You have killed him. You knew that your mean and brutal deed would be the death of him, and you are his murderer."

"Ain't this nice, now?" sneeringly observed Birkett, as he turned to ask the opinion of the crowd. "A fellow who was kicked out of Butte as a loafer and a thief has the cheek to call a decent man a scoundrel."

"And you *are* a scoundrel," thundered Dick Herries—"as mean a villain as ever went unhung—a sneaking scamp, who will never get his deserts until his neck is stretched."

This turn of the affair was "nuts" to Andrew Birkett, who perceived that the rage of his enemy might excite sympathy for himself, and he naturally sought to aggravate the angry man.

"Better think about your own neck when you talk about stretching," said he, "as it is easy to prove that yours is the one that needs that sort of treatment. You know well enough, and plenty of other people know it, that you were driven out of Butte as a loafer and a thief, and since then you have turned murderer and robber—that's all the difference."

"More of your villainy, you scoundrel!" shouted Dick Herries, and he rushed at his enemy without stopping to draw his revolver.

Andrew Birkett was better prepared.

Such a rash action on the part of his excited antagonist was just what he had been endeavoring to provoke, as it would enable him to shoot Herries down and justify the deed.

His pistol was out and ready for business instantly.

Other revolvers clicked, and excited men on each side sprung forward with hostile intent.

The situation was more serious than ever, and the peacemakers saw no chance to avoid a conflict.

But a sudden commotion interfered with the intentions of the belligerents, and possibly spoiled some of their plans.

There was a noise of rapid hoofs near by, mingled with loud but unavailing cries of "Whoa!"

A horse that seemed to have got beyond the control of its rider came bursting into the throng, snorting, rearing, and plunging.

This unexpected performance upset things immediately, and the men, to avoid being knocked over, and perhaps seriously injured, hastened to get out of the brute's way.

As they backed and scampered and tumbled over each other, they hurled curses and epithets in profusion at the beast and his rider.

The horse forced his way into the midst of the throng, and between the two principal belligerents before the man on his back, in spite of his apparently strenuous efforts, was able to subdue him.

Then it was seen that the rider was no other than Sam Slevin, who was personally known to most of those present.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, as he finally reined in his panting and per-

spiring steed. "I don't know what's got into this horse of mine. I never knew him to behave so before. But he took a sudden notion to make a break, and dashed in here before I could get hold of him. Hope I haven't interrupted anything in the way of a public meeting. What's the excitement, anyhow?"

"Nothing much," answered Matt Grace, who was the coolest person in the crowd, with the exception of Sam Slevin.

"Nothing much. There is a bit of a difficulty here, which was in a fair way of being settled peaceably, and I don't see that you have done anything to hinder the settlement. Light down, and I will let you into the rights of it as well as I can."

Slevin dismounted, and Matt Grace told him in his own way, taking his own time for it, what had caused the crowd and occasioned the excitement.

This narration had a soothing effect for more than one reason.

While the story was being told, Sam stood there with his horse, a living barrier between the belligerents, thus spoiling their chance of starting a sociable fight without forcing the issue unreasonably.

Matt Grace's manner of telling the story was also a damper upon the spirits of the assemblage.

He told it so leisurely and so coolly, and at the same time with such a gentle but pointed bias in favor of Dick Herries's side, that the boiling passions of the crowd were obliged to simmer down in spite of themselves.

This state of calm was noticed and appreciated by Slevin, who hastened to take advantage of it.

"You have all done well," he said, "and the disposition shown by both parties to this little difficulty is admirable. It is so much better that such matters should be settled quietly, and the scheme of holding a sort of advance trial here is a fair and good one."

"But Angus Dameron is dead, Sam," suggested Dick Herries.

"That is a great pity, for his sake and yours, and I am afraid that your daughter is in trouble. But I will ride over to the house and attend to matters there. While I am gone, gentlemen, suppose you organize your court, and we will try to square up this business like good citizens."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FOUND GUILTY.

SAM SLEVIN's proposition was assented to, and he started on his mission at once.

It was easy to get out of the crowd, as the men hastened to make way for him, though his horse was quiet enough then.

He soon crossed the creek, spurred up the slope on the other side, and dismounted at the new house.

There he found somebody to whom his coming was nothing less than a godsend.

It was Kate Herries, who was alone in the house with the stricken man.

Not quite alone; but the Chinese cook was of no earthly use in such an emergency.

The poor girl was nearly distracted, but by uncertainty and fear for her father as much as by the rude invasion of the household and the presence of death.

In a few words as possible he put her in possession of the facts of the case, calming and soothing her as well as he could.

Then he asked her to tell him exactly what had happened at the house.

It was a sad and shocking story.

Mr. Dameron was worse that day, and Kate had been so busy attending to his wants and making him comfortable that she had not stepped out of doors or even looked across the creek, and consequently knew nothing of the excitement over at Whitewood.

He was seated in his easy-chair, propped up with pillows, and Kate was busy in another part of the room, when the two men whom Andrew Birkett had sent suddenly stamped into the room.

"You're my pris'ner, pard," said one of them, as he rudely grasped the sick man's shoulder. "You're arrested for the murder of Jim Boggs. We've got Dick Herries, the other chap who was in the job, and you must go with us and stand your trial."

Kate came running forward to protest indignantly against the outrageous conduct of the two roughs.

But she was silenced and horrified by the sight of Angus Dameron.

A great change had come over him before the man ceased speaking to him.

He gasped, and his lips trembled as if in a vain effort to say something, and then his face turned ashy pale, and his head dropped forward on his breast.

This was death, or so like death that even the two roughs shrunk back and were silent.

"He is dead!" cried Kate. "You have killed him, you wretches, you villains, you murderers!"

"Durned if I don't believe he's dead," said the spokesman of the pair, as he took a step forward.

"Say, old pard, have you gone down the flume? Have you passed in your chips for sure?"

There was no answer—not the faintest quiver of the white lips, nor the least light in the glassy eyes.

"He has slid out, for a fact," declared the rough. "Well, that end of the business is straightened out, and we needn't bother about him no more. Come on, Bill."

They went away, leaving Kate alone.

Then she looked out across the creek, and saw the crowd gathered at Whitewood, and knew that something dreadful had occurred over there, as well as at the home which had lately been so pleasant to her.

But she was unable to relieve her anxiety, as she did not dare to leave the house, and she was helpless until her lover came to support and comfort her.

"Are you sure that Mr. Dameron is dead?" inquired Slevin.

"I am afraid he is," she answered. "I suppose he must be. But there is something about him that makes me doubt. I have thought that I felt his heart beat."

Sam hastened to the lifeless form of Angus Dameron, examined his eyes, listened at his heart, and felt of his wrist.

He was sure that he noticed a faint thrill or flutter of the pulse.

"He is not dead, Kate!" exclaimed the young man. "He has had a stroke, but it has not killed him. I am sure that he is yet alive."

Kate brought a spoon, and Slevin produced a bottle of whisky, the usual frontier remedy for all sorts of "strokes."

He managed to get a few drops into Angus Dameron's mouth, and gradually a little more and more, until the insensible man revived under the influence of the potent stimulus.

He shuddered, gasped, and finally opened his eyes.

That he was alive was evident; but it soon became equally evident that he was quite incapable of speech or motion of any kind.

He was as helpless as any dead man.

"It is paralysis, Kate," said Slevin. "There is nothing more that we can do now. I must hurry over yonder to look after your father, and I will find Dr. Cline and send him here."

Harry Cline, known in Whitewood as "The Doctor," was a young physician who had gone West to grow up with the country and to become wealthy and eminent in the practice of his profession.

He had succeeded in becoming employed as a day laborer in the Whitewood mine.

Sam Slevin found her in the crowd with the rest of the miners, and hurried him away to the assistance of Kate.

During the absence of the young man the impromptu court had been organized, and on his return it was ready for business.

Andrew Birkett, disappointed in his expectations of a fight in which his side would probably have had a decided advantage, assented sullenly to the arrangements as they were proposed and consummated.

Dick Herries, having had time to cool down, prudently kept in the background, and was only anxious for some news from Kate.

This was supplied by Sam on his arrival, with the further information that Angus Dameron was alive, though completely paralyzed.

The court was composed of Ben Ripley as judge, with six of the visitors to the mine as a jury—an arrangement which was appar-

ently so fair and impartial that neither side could object to it.

An adjournment was had to the Shamrock Saloon, where there was room for the principal performers at the rear, with a reasonable amount of space and plenty of occupation for the rest about the bar.

Andrew Birkett was put forward as the attorney for the prosecution, and Matt Grace cheerfully engaged himself to uphold the cause of the defendant.

Birkett stated the case for his side clearly and quite forcibly, averring that he would prove that Dick Herries had murdered Jim Boggs, and had then possessed himself of the murdered man's money and his rights in the mine which had since become known as the Whitewood mine.

"We will prove these facts," he said, "to the satisfaction of the gentlemen present, and here is Abner Boggs, the brother of the man who was killed, to demand that justice shall be done to his brother's murderer, and to claim the rights of which he has been robbed."

He called himself as a witness, and told of the discovery of the body of Jim Boggs, and of the statements made by Stephen Boreman's German tenant, which was afterward sworn to before a coroner.

He went on to describe the expulsion of Dick Herries from Butte, dwelling on the details with evident satisfaction.

"That scalawag," he said, mingling a little argument with his evidence, "who was driven away from Butte as a loafer and a thief, without a dollar in his pocket, turned up there in disguise less than two months later, dressed to the nines, and loaded with money. Jim Boggs is dead, and Dick Herries has got his money and his mine, and all you have to do is to put this and that together."

It was evident that this little speech made an impression upon the jury of visitors, and the impression was increased by the appearance and evidence of Abner Boggs.

He related the same state of facts that had been presented by Birkett, exclusive of the departure of Dick Herries from Butte and his return.

He also produced and read the last letter he had received from his brother, speaking of the discovery of the mine, his expectations from it, and the "pile" which he and his partner had with them in Indian Bill's Hole.

Stephen Boreman's German tenant was not present, as Andrew Birkett had not anticipated the contingency that had occurred, and the man would probably not have been willing to accompany the party in any event.

Kruger's testimony, therefore, as repeated by Birkett, was certified to by others of the party who had been present at the inquest, and it was expected that this would close the case for the prosecution.

But Andrew Birkett then took a bold step, the success of which assured him of his own astuteness, and stamped him as a good guesser.

Conjecturing that Stephen Boreman had not been informed of the death of Jim Boggs by either Dick Herries or Angus Dameron when they came to his house, he called on the ranchman, and pointedly asked him what they had then told him about the affair.

Stephen was obliged to confess that neither of them had said a word to him about it, and he further admitted that he had never heard of the death of Jim Boggs until that day in Whitewood.

The point told strongly against the accused.

If there had been nothing wrong about the killing of Jim Boggs, why had he kept it a secret from one of his nearest friends?

This was the case for the prosecution.

Part of the evidence might not have been admissible in a court of law; but in a court of "justice," such as had been established there in Whitewood, it was all right and proper.

Dick Herries was then permitted to state his side of the case.

He told how he had been driven from Butte through the malice of Andrew Birkett, as that individual had afterward admitted to him, and how he had been taken in by Stephen Boreman when he was perishing.

Then he went on to describe his unexpected arrival at the snow-buried cabin in

Indian Bill's Hole, and to relate the particulars of the attempt by Jim Boggs upon the life of Angus Dameron, and the subsequent assault upon himself, which had resulted in the death of Boggs.

As regarded the money and the mine, he said that Dameron had assured him that under an agreement between himself and Jim Boggs it was all to belong to the survivor of them, which state of facts had doubtless prompted Boggs's murderous attack.

It was at Angus Dameron's request that he, Dick Herries, had stepped into the place of the dead partner, who was held by them to have forfeited all his rights in the premises.

They had said nothing about the death of Jim Boggs, as they considered themselves clearly in the right, and thought it not worth while to make any fuss about the affair.

But it had been their intention, if the mine should "pan out well," to inquire for the heirs of Jim Boggs, and give them at least his forfeited share of the partnership money.

Dick Herries told this story clearly and plainly, and with an apparent desire to give the truth and conceal nothing.

Consequently his statement made a good impression upon the jury of visitors, as well as upon the Whitewood spectators.

But it was only his statement, with nothing but his word to back it, and its effect was weakened by his recent history as disclosed by Andrew Birkett, by the admitted fact that he had killed Jim Boggs and had taken possession of his property, and by his subsequent secrecy in regard to the entire affair.

Dick Herries perceived the weak points of his defense, and alluded to them.

"You have only my word for this," said he; "but Angus Dameron, if he had not been killed or nearly killed by the shock of his brutal treatment to-day, would tell you that I have spoken the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I hope he may have at least recovered his voice by this time, so that he can back up what I have said."

This was a vain hope.

Harry Cline came in from the house across the creek, bringing the sad intelligence that Angus Dameron was helplessly and hopelessly paralyzed, incapable of speech or motion.

The jury, led by Ben Ripley as judge and foreman, got together in a corner, where they consulted in whispers.

In a few minutes the result was announced by Ben Ripley.

"The verdict of the jury is," said he, "that they are sorry for it, but the evidence against Dick Herries is so strong that he will have to go and stand his trial."

CHAPTER XXX.

MUGGS GETS HIS WORK IN.

SIMON MUGGS, known to the general public as Muggs of Muggsville, was not an inactive person. He atoned for his lack of beauty by his abundance, seeming to possess the faculty of being everywhere at once.

That was of course an exaggeration of the sure enough fact that he could distribute himself over a large surface with amazing celerity.

Without in any way neglecting the duty to which he had been assigned by Silver Sam, he happened to be in Butte at the time of the excitement occasioned by the finding of the body of Jim Boggs and the coroner's inquest and subsequent proceedings.

Muggs was deeply interested in those matters, as Dick Herries was the father of Kate Herries, and the affection of her ugly guardian for the girl had amounted to adoration.

She was also very dear to Sam Slevin, who was worshiped by his tough adherent, and who was supposed to be still a Whitewood whither he had taken her to join her father.

Thus it came to pass that Simon Muggs, having some information which he wished to present to his leader and employer, made that an excuse for a visit to Whitewood shortly after the departure of Andrew Birkett's party.

As he was mounted on a tough Indian pony, that was accustomed to surmounting all manner of natural obstacles, he decided upon saving time and distance by taking a

short cut through the pass that was known as Indian Bill's Hole.

When he had got as far into the canyon as the cabin that had sheltered Angus Dameron and Jim Boggs, it was natural that he should desire to visit the scene of the tragedy which had been the cause of so much comment.

He rode up to the dilapidated cabin, and found the door nailed shut as Andrew Birkett and his friends had left it.

But Muggs, who had the habit of doing what he set out to do, was not to be hindered by a little thing like that.

Hitching his pony, he easily effected an entrance, and examined the interior of the cabin at his leisure, while he cooked a bit of supper for himself on the vacant hearth, expecting to pass the night there.

He noted the blood-stains on the floor, the bloody track that led to the entrance, and the few rude articles of furniture that had been left, rusty, damp, moldy and mildewed, and thought that he had taken in the entire location and surroundings of the killing of Jim Boggs.

But his fire, when it blazed up brightly on the hearth, showed him something that he had overlooked.

It was a small matter, only a coat that hung against the wall in a corner.

Not much of a coat, either—probably a working coat that had belonged to one of the men who had inhabited the cabin for a while.

It was so worn and tattered that it had evidently outlived its usefulness, and Angus Dameron had not thought it worth taking away, and the men who had subsequently entered the cabin had not thought it worth noticing.

But Muggs had a turn of mind that did not permit him to consider anything a trifle.

He had been to a considerable extent educated by Sam Slevin, who had found him a very useful ally, and in whose employment he had learned that there are more places than one in which truth may be found, and more ways than one of getting at it.

He took the coat down, handling it rather gingerly, carefully examining its outward aspect, and then searched the pockets.

His search was rewarded by the discovery of a letter that was sealed, directed, and even stamped ready for mailing.

Simon Muggs took it to the firelight, and a look of interest stole into his stolid face as he noted the direction.

Probably he had no conscientious scruples about opening another man's letter as a general thing. Certainly he had none in this case, as he hastened to cut open the envelope.

Then he brightened up his fire, and proceeded to read the letter.

Muggs was not a good reader of writing, and this writing was not particularly good, and it was a slow job for him to spell it out, but he had not got through with it when the knobs on his face glistened, and his eyes fairly bulged out of his head.

He jumped up, uttering a cry of joy that sounded like the yelp of a coyote.

Then he calmed down, put the letter back in the envelope, restored it to its pocket in the old coat, rolled that garment into a bundle and tied it tightly.

When the supper that he had prepared for himself had disappeared down his throat very rapidly, he seized the bundle, hurried out to his horse, mounted, and rode away up the canyon.

All night he rode, regardless of darkness and obstacles, of difficulties and dangers, and the next day he pushed his pony near to the limit of the tough little beast's endurance.

The pony, in fact, was nearly broken down when Muggs rode into the new and small camp of Whitewood.

Perceiving a crowd in front of the Shamrock Saloon, he urged his tired steed to that center of excitement.

The men outside, who were mostly miners, were so deeply engaged in the discussion of some absorbing subject, that they scarcely paused to notice the queer stranger on the pony.

"What do they say, Jim?" was the eager inquiry as they clustered around a man who had just come out of the saloon.

"They say that Mr. Herries is guilty, and that he's got to go."

"Does he mean to give in?"

"So he says. He agreed to leave it to those men, you know. But he sticks to it that he ain't guilty."

"And so he ain't, and we don't ought to let him be carried off by that crowd of rustlers."

Muggs had already dismounted and hitched his pony.

Gripping his bundle tightly, he forced his way into the saloon, and through the press of people about the bar, back to where Ben Ripley and his jury of visitors were standing, with Dick Herries and his friends and Andrew Birkett and his party.

The prominent citizen of Butte had an air, somewhat too evidently, of triumphant malice, while Dick Herries wore a troubled and downcast expression, and Sam Slevin had a look of perplexity.

Muggs pushed his way to Slevin, regardless of the grumbling and cursing of those whom he hustled about.

His leader's face lighted up when he saw him, and the look of perplexity changed to one of surprise.

"Hello, Muggs!" was Sam's greeting. "Where have you come from, and how did you happen to drop in here?"

Muggs made no verbal answer, but hastened to untie his precious bundle.

From the ragged coat he took the letter which he had opened, and handed it to his chief.

Slevin looked at the direction wonderingly, and glanced over the letter in a great hurry.

"Where did you get it, Muggs?" he demanded, in an excited whisper.

Muggs answered him as quickly and as briefly as possible, and Sam stepped forward briskly, his face and manner showing that some extraordinary occurrence had moved him.

"Mr. Ripley," he said, "I have a favor to ask of you. It is one which you will grant as a matter of course, because it is in the interest of justice. I want you to open this case and call the jury together again, as I have some new evidence to submit to them which has just come in."

Andrew Birkett protested largely against this course, declaring that the matter had been settled according to agreement, and no "after-claps" could be allowed.

But Ben Ripley paid no attention to the protest, his court being a court of "justice," rather than a court of law.

He called the meeting to order, and the members of the visiting jury assembled to hear the new evidence.

Slevin requested Boggs to step forward, and that individual obeyed, evidently wondering what was the matter.

The letter was folded so that only the signature was visible, and was placed before his eyes.

"Is that the handwriting of Jim Boggs, your brother?" asked Sam Slevin.

Abner admitted that it was.

"Look over the letter, then, and tell me whether you wish to read it to the jury or would prefer that I should do it."

Abner's eyes dilated as he glanced over the paper, and his face turned ashy pale.

He handed it back to his questioner, feebly saying that he did not care to read it aloud.

Silver Sam called upon Simon Muggs, who stated where and how he had found the letter.

Then the former read aloud this extraordinary and unexpected communication from Jim Boggs, addressed to his brother Abner.

"DEAR BROTHER:—

"Since I last wrote to you, asking you to come out here in the spring, things have changed, and now I don't want you to come unless you hear from me again.

"We are snowed in here, shut up in the cabin, and the loneliness of it, with the way we are buried alive, is nearly enough to drive a man crazy. I should go out of my mind if I stayed here much longer.

"Dameron has been sick here over three weeks, and I have had an awful hard time with him. He is so fretful and so queer that I have got out of all patience with him, and I mean to put an end to this sort of thing as he will never be any good.

"So I am going to make an end of him to-night or to-morrow, and then I will light out of here with the money. Perhaps I will go East, and wait for spring to look up the mine. Anyhow, I mean to get rid of Dameron for good and all.

"This may sound kinder awful to you who don't know anything about what men have to do out here; but the man has got scarcely a bit of life in him, and if you had been obliged to put up with him as long as I have, you would feel as I do.

"It will be a mercy to put him out of his pain, and if I had to stay here any longer I would go crazy. Sometimes I don't think I am straight, as it is."

"We made a written agreement before we settled down here, by which, if one of us shall die, the money and the mine will belong to the other. We gave the paper to a friend of ours named Jack Marvine. I don't know where he is now; but I will find him, and then the money question will be all straight."

"I will mail this when I get out, and all I want to say is that you must keep your tongue still and stay where you are until you hear more from me."

"I must quit now, as that cuss is staring at me in a way that takes the sense all out of me."

"So no more at present from

"Your affectionate brother,
"JAMES H. BOGGS."

This letter was a stunner—a delightful one to Dick Herries and his friends, but a crusher to Andrew Birkett and his party.

The date was the day previous to that which had been fixed by Dick Herries's admissions as the day that witnessed his arrival at the cabin in Indian Bill's Hole and the death of Jim Boggs.

The letter furnished convincing evidence from the dead man's own hand of his murderous intentions toward Angus Dameron, exactly corroborating the story told by Dick Herries.

It was enough.

The jury of visitors had another brief consultation, the result of which was thus announced by Ben Ripley:

"We say now that Dick Herries is innocent, and that he won't have to go."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MUGGS ON A SCOUT.

THE change in the position of affairs at Whitewood that was produced by the arrival of Muggs of Muggsville was as striking as it was sudden.

The miners and the other people of the camp, including the visitors, were rejoiced at the result that had cleared Dick Herries of the charge of murder, and the only discontented ones were Andrew Birkett and his party.

But the prominent citizen of Butte and his partisans found themselves so decidedly in the minority that they could do nothing but grumble inwardly or among themselves.

The visitors would be against them in a fight, as well as the residents of Whitewood, and against such odds it would not pay them to attempt to change the issue by a forcible appeal from the verdict of the impartial six men.

Therefore they quietly hauled in their horns, mounted their horses, and rode away peaceably in a body.

Some of them were inclined to believe that the business had been botched, and to accuse Andrew Birkett of cowardice; but he was convinced that the affair had been managed just as it should have been, and that they would have brought away their man triumphantly if it had not been for the extraordinary accident of the discovery of Jim Boggs's unfortunate letter.

Luck was against them—that was all.

Luck was most decidedly against Abner Boggs, who was the most mournful and downcast of the party.

Not only had he by his own evidence helped to set free the man who had killed his brother, but he had seen his chance of clutching a valuable mine and a goodly pile of money fade away until it was scarcely visible.

His only consolation was furnished by Andrew Birkett in the suggestion that Jack Marvine might not be found, and that his brother's letter might not be good enough evidence to defeat his claim in a court of law.

At Whitewood Muggs of Muggsville was the hero of the hour.

A joyful procession accompanied Dick Herries to his home; but the center of attraction was Muggs, who might have absorbed a barrel of whisky if he had accepted the invitations that were showered upon him, but who was more than content with the brief but pointed praise of his chief, Sam Slevin.

From the house the procession turned back after giving three rousing cheers for Dick Herries, which reached the ears of helpless Angus Dameron, and brought a flush into his pale face.

It also brought a fresher color to the cheeks and a brighter light to the eyes of

sweet Kate Herries, who was at the door awaiting her father and her lover.

The poor girl did not know what had happened, but could judge that a great danger had been safely passed, and a great triumph had been won.

As soon as possible the story was told to her, and her joy was so great that she pounced upon Muggs as the angel of the occasion, and kissed him again and again.

This great honor caused every knob of the ugly but honest fellow's face to shine like a carbuncle, and his eyes bulged until they seemed likely to drop out of his head.

The condition of Angus Dameron claimed the attention of his friends, and they were glad to perceive that, although he was quite helpless and incapable of speech, he did not seem to be suffering any pain, and was able to understand what was said to him.

His partner made him acquainted with the accusation and its outcome, and he found means to express his pleasure at the happy result of that unpromising affair.

Harry Cline was at once taken from the mine and installed as the physician and nurse of the invalid.

He was also instructed to procure, if necessary, the best medical assistance the Territory could afford, regardless of expense; but he was of the opinion that there was nothing that could be done in the case as it then presented itself, which was beyond his medical ability.

As for Muggs of Muggsville, he found himself in clover, and was so praised and petted that Slevin was afraid that he would be spoiled.

Muggs was of the same opinion, and so expressed himself to his employer.

"This won't do for me, boss," said he. "I'm gettin' to be as soft as putty, and won't be wuth shucks if I don't clear out of here."

As there was plenty for him to do elsewhere, he was advised to "clear out."

This he prepared to do, after imparting to Sam the information that had been the excuse for his visit to Whitewood.

It appeared that he had not been idle or useless since the departure of Slevin from Butte.

Shortly after that date, in obedience to the instructions he had received, he made ready for a journey over the divide, and relieved Butte of his presence for a while.

His preparations were few and very simple, his outfit consisting merely of the tough little pony that afterward carried him to Whitewood, his weapons and ammunition, and a few pounds of hard-tack.

He expected to be able to satisfy most of his bodily requirements by picking up game on the way, and in this respect he easily came up to his expectations.

Indeed, the bird or beast that could get away from Muggs of Muggsville when he wanted it, would need to be possessed of unusual shrewdness and capacity for scampering.

Following the directions that had been given him by Slevin, he came in sight of Bet Rawson's cabin, and then the problem of getting admission there presented itself.

But this was a question which he had argued out with himself as he came along, and he proceeded to carry into effect the plan which he had formed.

He would go there as a tramp, as a poor devil who had met with misfortunes, had been set afoot, and was starving in the wilderness.

First, he must dispose of the gallant steed of the Piegan strain that had brought him thither.

He searched the hills until he found a narrow glen with grass and water, that would suit his purpose and that of the pony.

One end was naturally impracticable of exit, and the other he barricaded with pieces of rock and branches of trees, until he had formed a corral from which even a climbing pony would not be likely to escape.

Within this corral, after turning his horse loose there, he concealed and covered from the weather his rifle, revolver and ammunition.

Then he added additional dilapidation and dirtiness to his personal appearance, approached the cabin, and presented himself to Bet Rawson as she was emerging from the door.

That strong-limbed and strong-minded fe-

male had been occupying herself in her loneliness with cherishing grudges against mankind in general and Andrew Birkett in particular.

The soft and balmy air of the opening season, with the sight of the fresh grass and the budding trees, and the pleasant odors of the pine trees and the fruitful earth, instead of inspiring her with a desire for continued solitude and poetic contemplation, had filled Bet Rawson with what she was in the habit of styling a spring fever.

A spring fever, in the general acceptation of the term, may be described as an indefinite longing to "go somewhere or do something."

But with Bet Rawson it was a definite and decided wish to quit the wilderness and get away to the settlements where gayety and spring dress goods were supposed to abound.

She was not at all fitted for the life she led there, having been accustomed to queen it in a small, but by no means select circle, where she had her own way, and where most of her desires were gratified.

It was more than hard that she, too obedient to the will of one selfish and unreliable man, should be tied to that lonely cabin ever so far from anywhere, with no companion but a woman who was a nuisance, and an incumbrance rather than company for her.

Again and again she declared that she would stand it no longer; but she had previously said the same thing so often that she must have felt that her declarations to that effect were not to be depended on.

This sort of feeling came over her strongly when she stepped out of the dingy cabin into the bright sunshine and the fresh air of the valley.

She had begun to relieve her mind with some very strong expressions in which profanity was not lacking, when her glance suddenly rested on the unexpected and preposterous figure of Simon Muggs.

An uglier object, and at the same time one more woebegone and pitiable, could hardly have been presented to her in human shape.

As she looked down upon him from her superior height, she gave a little start.

But it was not a start of fear.

It might be anything but that.

If there was any woman anywhere on the face of the earth who was utterly incapable of being scared at anything whatever, it was Bet Rawson.

At the time of the avalanche, when death was staring her in the face, she was as unconcerned as if she had no personal interest in the matter.

She was not in the least afraid of Muggs.

It was the sudden appearance of the dwarfish and misshapen creature before her, together with his extreme ugliness, that had startled her.

Her start was one of surprise, and her expression changed quickly to contempt and then to pity.

She folded her arms and surveyed him calmly.

"Who in blazes are you?" she profanely demanded.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BET RAWSON AND "BEAUTY."

MUGGS of Muggsville had his own opinion of the tall and formidable looking woman who stood before him and accosted him so roughly.

But that opinion could not be read in his hairy and knotted countenance, and he was surely not going to give it expression by words.

He had heard of her from Sam Slevin, and had formed an idea of his own concerning her, and that idea was pretty well sustained by the first sight he caught of her and by her style of speech.

He was no more afraid of her than she was of him, though he realized the fact that she would be no easy antagonist to whip in a rough-and-tumble encounter.

Simon Muggs, though he did not boast of his prowess, had never known the feeling of fear for any mortal enemies.

Whatever they might do to him, they at least could never spoil his looks.

Yet he was a little slow and hesitating in his response to the Amazon's sharp demand.

This was not because he was unprepared with an answer, but because it suited his game better to feign a little fear in connec-

tion with his aspect and attitude of deep humility.

He had well rehearsed the part he meant to play, and now he proceeded to tell the story which he had concocted for the purpose of this encounter.

He had intended to make it a brief though moving tale; but the shrewd questioning of Bet Rawson, accompanied by a look that seemed to read his inmost thoughts, compelled him to stretch it out and to put in many details that had not been in the original plan of the narration.

But he was equal to the occasion, and succeeded in giving her a plausible though rather intricate story, without tangling himself up, and without any contradictions that she could get hold of.

He told her how he happened to be alone in the wilderness, and had there fallen among thieves, like the man who went down from Jericho, and had found no good Samaritan to assist him in his sore extremity.

They had robbed him of his horse, his arms and ammunition, his little bit of money, and of all he had about him except a few segments of hard-tack in his coat pocket, with which he had been able to sustain life until he had come in sight of that cabin, where he had ventured to apply for food and help.

It was a pitiful story, pitifully told by a pitiful object, and the looks and tones of the object went far to confirm the truth of his tale.

"And, indeed, mum," said Muggs, at the conclusion of his narrative, "if thar's any work to be done about the place, you won't lose nothin' by takin' me in an' givin' me a bit to eat an' mebbe a place to sleep; for I'm a good hand with an ax, and always ready to do anythin' in the way of hard work."

Bet Rawson asked him a few questions concerning his previous employments, his destination at the time of the robbery, and other matters, all of which were answered to her satisfaction.

Then she looked him over and sized him up again, and scratched her head.

Scratching her head was a visible admission of the fact that she was in a quandary, and Muggs took advantage of her indecision to press his suit again and to beg for help yet more pitifully than before.

"I'll have to starve, mum," he said, "if I don't git holt o' suthin' to eat, and the good Lord knows that I'm more'n willin' to work for my livin'."

Bet Rawson soon made up her mind to take this stranger in and care for him.

She need not drive him away as she had done to Sam Slevin, because there was obviously nothing about him, in her view of the case, that she need be afraid of.

Not that she had been afraid of Silver Sam—she would have smiled at the thought.

But she had a plain and reasonable suspicion concerning that young man that he might be a spy.

He had followed so closely upon the tracks of Andrew Birkett, and his style and questions had been such, coupled with his mention of the name of Margaret Tellson, that she believed him to have come there for the purpose of defeating Birkett's plans in relation to the money which she was to share.

Therefore she had routed him and scouted him and sent him off with the biggest kind of a flea in his ear.

But she could have no such suspicion concerning such a pitiable object as Muggs.

He was clearly a waif and a stray, a poor devil who had been sadly misused, and who did not seem to have wit enough to spy out anything for anybody.

Besides, he was a man, though a very ugly one, and as such he might be useful to her—perhaps as a sort of compound of man and dog.

That was the notion she had of him just then, and it would have surprised her greatly if she could have known how widely he differed from that notion.

She had not had a man to do a stroke of work for her since Josh Cattermole kindly replenished her woodpile.

She had not forgotten how grateful she had been for that help, and the days were getting to be so warm that wood-chopping must be more than ever unpleasant to her, and there were many odds and ends of work

at that season which she would be glad to have done for her.

Therefore she had compassion on Muggs of Muggsville, and was quite willing to give him a lift.

"Seems like you've had hard luck," said she, "and it's apt to get harder if somebody don't look after you. What's your name?"

"Simon Peter," answered Muggs, who had invented that name with some difficulty.

"Queer name, that; but it's a good Scriptur' name, and I reckon you're all right. How long since was you in Butte?"

"Never been in Butte in all my born days," lied Muggs.

"Come in, then, and grub up, and I'll see if I can find somethin' for you to do."

Muggs gladly but humbly accepted the invitation.

When he followed her into the cabin he took in almost at a glance every detail of the interior, including the partition that evidently cut off another room from the main apartment.

Bet Rawson set out some provisions, showed him the cooking utensils, and told him to prepare a dinner for himself.

Muggs went to work at once, and she seated herself in a chair and watched him.

She could not help admiring the handiness and at the same time the neatness with which he did this work.

No woman, however well-trained and accustomed to the labor, could have cooked a meal more deftly and quickly.

Bet Rawson sighed softly, but her sigh was evidently one of satisfaction at the thought that she had secured a treasure.

"I ain't sure but you can beat a Chinaman," she said. "Now let me see you eat."

Muggs was ready for this ordeal, and was prepared to prove by his voracity the truth of his assertion that he was nearly starved to death.

He had deprived himself of breakfast that morning, and his unwonted tongue exercise had stimulated his appetite, which was usually something enormous.

He stowed away the food so rapidly and ravenously that Bet Rawson, doubtless fearing that he would breed a famine in the cabin, was fain to call a halt.

"Better quit before you bu'st," was her rather impolite way of putting it.

Muggs quit.

As a matter of fact he was glad to quit, as he was incapable of stuffing any more.

Bet Rawson was so well satisfied with his performance that she brought out an old pipe and some tobacco, and invited him to smoke, as if realizing the fact that he was not equal to any further bodily exertion just then.

As he smoked she talked to him, and with her talk she mingled some more shrewd and searching questions.

But Muggs was then thoroughly master of himself and of the situation, and his replies were so plausible and plain that her fancy for him grew stronger.

No doubt it would be a good thing to have a man in the house, especially such a handy man, and it would be a great relief to her to talk to him, in spite of his quite inexcusable ugliness.

"That name of yours is a queer one," she observed, "and it's 'most too much of a Scriptur' name to suit me. So, if you don't object, I will call you Beauty."

After he had enjoyed his smoke she gave him an ax and sent him out to cut fire-wood, while she seated herself in the shade and congratulated herself on her acquisition.

She soon had better reason to congratulate herself, and Robinson Crusoe could not have been more rejoiced at finding his man Friday than was Bet Rawson by the discovery of her "Beauty."

He was such a wonderful compound of man, dog and woman—as strong as any man need to be, as faithful and humble as a dog, and as neat and handy as a woman.

In addition to his outdoor avocations, in which he was very useful, he took all the housework off her hands, and she was obliged to admit that she could not have done it more thoroughly or more deftly herself.

Though his appetite was enormous he brought in game enough to more than pay for his board, and he could coil up and sleep in a corner of the room, and was never in the way.

It was wonderful, too, how interesting he proved to be, in spite of his ugliness.

Although uneducated, and evidently unaccustomed to anything that could be called society, he had a plentiful store of out-of-the-way knowledge—mainly relating to trees and plants and birds and beasts—in which Bet Rawson took such an interest as surprised herself, and it astonished her to discover what an entertaining companion she had secured.

Muggs of Muggsville, while thus making his footing good at Bet Rawson's cabin, did not fail to keep an eye out for business.

In fact, he noted with both his eyes and his two ears all that was done and said, especially keeping a close watch over the partition that concealed the mystery which he desired to penetrate.

He did not betray the least inquisitiveness, however, but waited patiently for affairs to develop, and for the tongue of a woman to do its perfect work.

It was of course soon made manifest to him that there was a woman in there, and that her name was Maggie—at least, that was the name Bet Rawson gave her.

This was more than Slevin had been able to learn, and Muggs, who had the inside track of the establishment, did not doubt that he would easily pick up more information.

But Bet Rawson did not feel disposed to give him any points of value, merely mentioning the matter carelessly when it was evident that he was aware of the presence of another person in the cabin.

"Only a poor woman," she said, "sick, and scarcely half-witted, who has to be watched and attended to."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TIME AND THE MAN.

It would have been easy for "Beauty," situated as he was, to force a solution of the mystery by "main strength and awkwardness"—to conquer Bet Rawson, bind her, break open the door of the partition, and see for himself who and what was inside.

But he would have been quite unwilling to personally injure the woman who had been so kind to him, and who esteemed his good qualities so highly.

Nor would he as far as he could see, further his designs by resorting to brute force.

It was quite likely that Bet Rawson's statement was true, and that the woman behind the partition was some poor invalid with whom neither Sam Slevin nor Andrew Birkett had anything to do.

Besides, he had not been instructed by Sam to go to work in that fashion, but merely to wait and watch.

It was not Bet Rawson whom he was to conquer or confound, but Andrew Birkett, and Slevin had assured him that if his suspicions concerning the woman in the cabin were true, the prominent citizen of Butte would be sure to make his way out there before long.

Then, if ever, the time would come for playing a bold and aggressive part.

Muggs shortly began to perceive what he took to be indications of the approach of that time.

Bet Rawson began to grow more restless and uneasy than ever, straying away from the cabin more frequently, often glancing at a calendar that hung on the wall, and occasionally muttering indistinct allusions to some coming event.

At last, after her handy man had been there nearly a week, she made an important communication to him.

"You'll have to clear out of this, Beauty," was her remark.

Muggs put up such a piteous face that she softened toward him at once.

"Only for a little while," she said, and went on to explain the reason of her edict of banishment.

"I am expecting some friends here tomorrow—some gentlemen from Butte—and I won't want them to see you about the place. They will have some business to attend to which you don't need to mix up with. So you will have to clear out for a bit."

The knobs on her retainer's face glistened, to show how glad he was that he was to be sent away only for a while.

"You needn't go far," she continued—

"just keep out o' sight. In this weather you can lay out anywhere in the hills quite comfortable, and you may take what grub you want and somethin' to cook with. But you musn't come nigh the house for a day or two. Kinder scout around, out o' sight, and when you see some o' my togs hangin' up on a pole, then you can come a-kinin'."

Muggs protested that he could sleep on the ground as well as anywhere, that she needn't bother about his grub, and that he was happy only when he was obeying her orders.

After giving her instructions, she muttered something that was audible to "Beauty."

"If he don't come as he promised, and don't settle it right up, there'll be trouble in the family."

To Muggs his demission was the occasion of much inward joy.

It was just what he wanted, giving him two points which he had greatly desired to gain.

He learned that the expected time was approaching, and just when it would arrive.

As a matter of course, one of the "gentlemen from Butte" must be Andrew Birkett, and it might be possible for a sharp fellow with good eyes and ears to find out why he came there and what he did there.

In the second place, it would give Muggs something better than an excuse for absenting himself from the cabin during Andrew Birkett's stay there.

The gentleman from Butte would be sure to recognize him if he should see him, and that could not fail to make trouble.

He had racked his brain with trying to devise a scheme for getting out of the scrape in the event of Birkett's sudden arrival, but had not been able to hit upon anything that seemed to suit the case.

Now Bet Rawson had kindly cleared the way for him, making everything easy.

It was no wonder that he adored her, and was thankful he had not been tempted to ill-use her.

He could feel sure, too, as she was anxious that his presence should not be known, that she would give Birkett no description of him.

These complications being so satisfactorily settled, he hastened to make such arrangements as would enable him to act as a spy upon the gentleman from Butte and his companions, whoever they might be.

Taking advantage of one of Bet Rawson's absences, he fashioned what may be styled a peep-hole for the purpose of outside observation.

He skillfully removed a piece of a log from an end of the cabin, and carefully replaced it, leaving it so that he could remove it from the outside when he wished to do so.

Then he arranged on the outside, adjoining his peep-hole, a cover with a lot of old boards and rubbish, making it so that the stuff seemed to have been thrown together carelessly, but at the same time leaving in the pile a hole where he could lie *perdu*, and take note of what was going on within.

The next morning, in obedience to the instructions of Bet Rawson, he left the cabin, promising that he would keep out of sight until she should hoist her signal.

He did not say that he would keep away from the cabin; but he fully intended to make good his assurance that he would keep out of sight.

It was highly important that he should do so.

He first went to the secret glen where he had established his corral, to see how his pony was getting on.

He found that steed of the Piegan strain still there, in good condition, and evidently glad to see him.

Then he concealed himself within sight of the cabin, and where he could watch the trail which he had followed when he came from Butte.

He had a long wait; but he was apparently possessed of unlimited patience.

About the middle of the afternoon he was rewarded by the sight of two men, who came riding slowly up the trail, as if their horses were fatigued by a long journey.

From his hiding-place he easily recognized both of them.

One was Andrew Birkett, and the other

was Alf Sanders, a man of somewhat smoky reputation, who officiated as a justice of the peace at Butte.

They were talking together earnestly, but Muggs was not near enough to hear what was said.

He saw them cross the valley and head for the cabin, where Bet Rawson was waiting for them, and watched them until they had hitched their horses and gone in.

Then he followed them—not exactly followed, but went there, too.

For his own sake, he was mindful of his promise to keep out of sight, and did not intend to allow the gentlemen from Butte to catch a glimpse of him.

Therefore he made a circuit by which he reached the other side of the valley, and made his way along the base of the mountain under cover of the rocks and trees and undergrowth, to the cabin, striking it on the side where he had established his hiding-place.

In this advance there was the risk to run that some person might come out of the cabin and use his eyes a little too well; but Muggs guarded against that danger as carefully as possible, and the intervals during which he might have been visible were few and very brief.

He crept into his hiding-place, and pulled a piece of board over the hole at which he had entered, thus making his cover complete.

Then he cautiously removed the bit of log which he had arranged for that purpose, leaving a hole through which he could hear and partly see what was going on within.

His chances for hearing were good enough, but his ability to see was marred by the dim light of the interior of the cabin, and by the necessity of keeping his peep-hole so small that it would not be noticed from within.

He saw the two men from Butte seated there, and saw Bet Rawson preparing food and drink for them.

No doubt she would have been glad of the help of her handy man just then, so that she might have been free to let her tongue run, and to sit and listen to what was said by the others.

But she found time enough to ask many questions concerning what was going on in the world as represented by that region, and it was plain that her consuming desire for news was only partially satisfied by the cautious answers of Andrew Birkett.

Some of the subjects that were touched upon were discussed in a low tone, Birkett occasionally holding up his finger and pointing at the partition, as if anxious that the occupant of that room should not hear what was said.

The gentleman from Butte, however, was seated near the peep-hole, and most of his words were easily absorbed by the eager ears of Muggs.

Bet Rawson told with much glee the story of Sam Slevin's visit to the cabin, his inquisitive ways, and the able style in which she had treated him as a mob and dispersed him.

She did not know the name of the intrusive stranger, but described him accurately, and suggested that from her description Birkett might be able to recognize him.

As it happened, he did not need the description to enable him to "spot" the intruder.

"I know that scamp well enough," he said. "Indeed, I know him a durned sight too well. He has got a hint of the scheme I am working, and is the one man I must watch and guard against. Though I left Butte secretly, he was on my track, and followed me out here. You did a good thing, Bet, when you drove him off, though it would have been better if you had put a bullet through his head and made an end of him."

"I hain't got into the business yet, Andrew Birkett, of shootin' men down in cold blood; but you may bet your sweet life that he didn't find out anythin' here, and never will."

"Good girl! I know that I can depend on you for that. Has anybody else been around here since that time?"

"Not a soul," she answered, lying promptly and without a blush.

Perhaps she did not consider "Beauty" anybody, or that he possessed a soul.

"I dropped on him," resumed Andrew Birkett, "shortly after I left you. As soon

as I struck the trail again it told me that somebody had been following me, and I at once suspected that same scalawag. So I stopped on the way and laid for him, meaning to give him a lesson that would cure him of meddling forever and amen. I had as fair a shot at him as I could ever ask to have, and drew a good bead; but luck was against me, and I only killed his horse. I had the satisfaction of knowing, though, that I had set him afoot, and that he would have a tough tramp getting back to Butte."

"Didn't he go for you when he got there?" inquired Bet Rawson.

"Not a bit of it. I gave him plenty of chances; but I judge that he is too much of a sneak to try to get even with me that way. All I need to do is to keep him off my trail, and that's why I waited until I knew that he was far away before I started to come out here."

"I am glad you didn't kill him, Andy. I don't like that sort of thing."

"That's my business, old girl. If I see a good chance to take his head off, I'll try it again."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SPY AND A SNEAK THIEF.

THE work of spying proved to be tedious business for Muggs, and not a little painful as well as tiresome.

He found himself in a cramped position in his hiding-place, and the necessities of the situation were such that he could scarcely stir sufficiently to relieve his stiffened limbs and aching joints.

But he was as tough as he was ugly, and the delight of the discoveries he had made and expected to make more than compensated him for his physical miseries.

To be sure he had as yet learned little that he had not already known; but some of the conversation that he caught had given him hints of further revelation which he anxiously awaited.

Therefore he was willing to suffer and be patient, in the hope of getting a valuable report for Sam Slevin, for whom he would at any time willingly have periled his life.

His waiting became quite wearisome before anything further of interest occurred, and then it was not a matter of much consequence.

It seemed that the occupant of the closed-off apartment became impatient of confinement or anxious to know what was going on, as there was a knocking on the door of the partition which Muggs heard plainly.

Bet Rawson went in there, but stayed only a few minutes.

"I have told her that you are here, Andy, and she wants to see you," the woman said when she came out.

Andrew Birkett went behind the partition, and remained there fully half an hour.

In the mean time Bet Rawson and Alf Sanders talked of matters that were not interesting to Muggs.

"You were in there with her a long time," she said, when the prominent citizen of Butte at last came out.

"Don't be a jealous fool, Bet," sharply replied Birkett. "If you ever have any cause for jealousy, it has nothing to do with this place and that woman. This is business and nothing but business, and I am glad to be able to tell you that it will soon be settled. She is going to sign the power of attorney, and Alf Sanders will fix it up to fit the law, and then I will have all I want out of her."

"When will she do it, Andy?"

"Pretty soon. There is no hurry. We will have supper first, and you had better start to getting it."

Bet Rawson set about this work with alacrity, and soon had her supper smoking on the table.

A lamp was lighted, and a portion of the meal was taken in behind the partition.

The sight and smell of the food filled Muggs with longing, and increased his internal misery, as he had had nothing to eat since morning.

But he partially satisfied the cravings of his appetite by gnawing some scraps which he had brought away from the cabin, and patiently awaited the next scene in the drama.

When supper was over the two men smoked

their pipes while Bet Rawson cleared off the table.

Then the door of the partition was opened, and Andrew Birkett led out a woman at whom Muggs gazed with intense interest.

No doubt his eyes bulged out then, and the knobs on his face shone redly; but nobody was present to witness those marvelous phenomena.

The light was none too good; but the spy could see, as she issued from the partitioned room, that the woman was not young, though care and confinement, and perhaps illness, probably made her look older than she was.

She was very pale, and her face had an expression of settled sadness, and she walked feebly and irresolutely, as if she had for a long time been deprived of light and air and the free use of her limbs.

She was given a chair at the table, and as she sat there Muggs took in every detail of her form and features and attire, impressing them upon his memory so that he was sure that he could describe her accurately to Sam Slevin.

Alf Sanders opened a folded paper and laid it on the table.

"There is the place to sign your name," said Birkett as he handed the woman a pen.

"I want to know," she feebly began; but Birkett interrupted her with an oath.

"What do you want to know? I have explained everything to you, and you understand it. All you have to do is to sign the paper."

"Yes, I know I understand it; but I want these others to understand it. I am told by Mr. Birkett that if I sign this paper I am to be restored to my family. Is that right, Mr. Birkett?"

"Quite right, ma'am. I will do just what I told you I would do."

"How soon?"

"As soon as some legal formalities can be attended to, and that will take but a very little while."

She started to sign the paper, but hesitated again.

"I know you, Mr. Sanders," she said, "and I suppose you know me. Mr. Birkett tells me that this is done for my good, and that the money he collects will go to my family. I hope that this statement is true."

"I have no doubt that it is," cheerfully replied the Butte official. "Mr. Birkett is a responsible man, and his word is as good as his bond."

"Thank you, sir. It is not the money that I care for, though I would be glad to have it. It is a small matter compared with the promise that I shall be restored to my family. Trusting in that promise I will sign the paper."

She signed it in a feeble and trembling hand, and sunk back into her chair.

Alf Sanders affixed to the document his official formula and name, and Andrew Birkett, after drying the ink, folded the paper and put it in an inner breast-pocket of his coat.

Then Bet Rawson led the other woman back into her room, and closed and locked the partition door.

This scene being over, it occurred to the spy that the time had come when he could creep out from his confinement to stretch his limbs and get a breath of fresh air.

He was about to put this pleasant idea into execution when he discovered that the two men inside of the cabin had been seized by a similar desire to get outside.

Directly they put on their hats and went out.

This proceeding knocked Muggs's notion in the head, and he groaned inwardly as he resigned himself to the necessity of keeping shut up in his close quarters.

It would still have been possible for him to emerge; but there was a risk in the attempt, and he could not afford to peril the discoveries he had made and the design he expected to execute.

Fortunately for him Andrew Birkett and Alf Sanders did not stay long outside, the night being dark and the air a little chilly.

After attending to their horses, and after a little conversation which the spy was unable to catch, they returned into the cabin together.

"We will take a smoke, Alf, and then we will turn in," said Birkett. "We will need

a good sleep, as we must start early in the morning and ride hard to-morrow."

This suited Muggs exactly.

He waited until they were seated with their pipes, and then gladly crawled out of his confinement.

The relief was great.

Though he did not run about, as he felt inclined to do, he gave his arms and legs some good, healthy stretches, and the cool night air was like an elixir of life to him.

He walked along the base of the mountain a little distance, and then returned to the cabin, maturing as he went a plan that had been forming in his mind since he witnessed the signing of the paper in there.

When he crawled into his concealment again he felt refreshed and ready for any duty or adventure that the occasion might require.

The two gentlemen from Butte had finished their smoke, and were preparing for sleep.

Bet Rawson occupied the bed and the men coiled up on the floor, between the partition and the door, on a spread of blankets.

Under the circumstances they did not think of undressing, but divested themselves of their coats and watches before lying down.

This part of the performance was watched with eager interest by the spy at his peephole, and it delighted him to perceive that Andrew Birkett's coat was hung on a peg near the door.

Muggs thus knew the exact location of the paper which the woman had signed, unless it had been changed during his brief absence, which was not at all likely.

He waited until all three were apparently sound asleep.

Then he emerged from his hiding-place, quietly stole around to the front of the cabin and tried the door.

It opened easily, as the only fastening was a bar on the inside, and he had noticed that the bar had not been put up.

The spy stepped in, making no more noise than a cat would have made, and softly closed the door, lest a draft of cool air from without should awaken the sleepers.

The light had been extinguished, but his organ of locality, as the phrenologist calls it, was well developed, and he knew just where to go and what to do.

He felt in the inner breast pocket of Andrew Birkett's coat as it hung on the peg, found the paper which he had seen placed there, secured it, and departed as quietly as he had come.

The sleepers slept on without the faintest sign of awaking.

Muggs put a considerable distance between himself and the cabin before he halted.

Then he unfolded the paper, struck a match, and examined the signature.

In the feeble and trembling characters he read "Margaret Tellson."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MISSION FOR MUGGS.

HAVING secured this interesting and important piece of information, Muggs of Muggsville was satisfied for the present, and bethought him of his own comfort and needs.

He selected the driest spot he could find behind a clump of bushes, laid his tired body down on the moist and cool ground, and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

But the next day had not yet dawned when he was awake and astir.

He shook himself as a dog might, and was bright and active at once.

Although he had secured possession of the important document, it was quite possible that Andrew Birkett might discover the theft and cause the execution of another paper to replace it.

This was a point to be watched and guarded against.

At all events, the discovery, if it should be made, would raise a row in the cabin, and Muggs was anxious to be on hand to witness that row.

Therefore he returned to the cabin, quietly crept back into his hiding-place, and carefully covered the opening.

When he removed his bit of log and peeped in, he saw that the men were already stirring, in order that they might have an early start.

Birkett roused up Bet Rawson, ordering

her to hurry and prepare breakfast for them, and she set about the work, rubbing her eyes and grumbling.

In the mean time, the men had their morning drams and went out to look after their horses.

Muggs noticed that when Andrew Birkett put on his coat he buttoned it up, as if to insure the safety of his valuable document, but did not first feel for it to make sure that it was there.

Why should he do so, when he could not have the slightest cause for suspecting that it might have disappeared?

This was highly satisfactory, and Muggs watched the subsequent proceedings with interest.

Breakfast was speedily prepared and dispatched, and the two gentlemen from Butte lighted their pipes, at the same time making ready for their departure.

Bet Rawson, who was restless and excited, had a last word to say to Andrew Birkett, and took him outside the cabin to say it.

He went unwillingly, protesting that everything was all right and there was nothing more to be said; but she had a strong will when she chose to assert it, and she compelled his obedience.

As it happened, they came around to the side of the cabin where Muggs was stationed, and he was able to overhear them.

"I just want to have things plainly understood between us," said she, "before you light out."

"Don't make any bother, Bet, that's a good girl," entreated Birkett. "You have done splendidly so far, and I am doing my best to get through with my part of the business, and in a little while everything will be straight, and I pledge you my word that you shall be satisfied."

"Your word ain't worth shucks, Andy Birkett, and you know that I know that. I mean to be satisfied, or I will start a blizzard that will tear you limbless, and that's the word with the bark on. Tell me, now, what you are goin' to do next?"

"I am going to write to that lawyer to let him know that I've got the power of attorney all straight, and then I will go on there to sell the property and get the money."

"How soon will you go?"

"In about ten days, as near as I can calculate."

"And you will take me, Andy."

"Will I?"

"You may just bet high that you will. That will satisfy me, and nothin' short of that."

"It's a little rough, Bet, as I won't want to be bothered with a woman, and it will cost quite a pile."

"Take the extra cost out of my share of the plunder."

"Well, I suppose I must do it if you insist on it, though I will have to come out here to fetch you away, and that will stretch the business out."

"Let her stretch! See to it that you come, Andy. That will square things, and nothin' else will, and don't you forget it."

"All right; only don't drive me wild with any more talk. I've got other things to think about."

"It will be healthy for you to think of what I tell you. When I leave here, Andy, what will be done with the woman in there? Will she go to her friends then?"

"Not much. I will have to get the money salted down before that happens. Won't she die?"

"Reckon not. There's a heap of hold out to her."

"Then I will have to put her out of the way somehow."

"What do you mean by that, Andy? To kill her?"

"Of course not; I'm no woman-killer. I suppose I must find another place for her."

"I will be glad to get her off my hands, anyways. Now you may slide out, Andy, and I will look for you in ten days, or thereabouts."

Andrew Birkett was sulky when he mounted his horse, and he bade Bet Rawson a gruff good-by as he rode away with Alf Sanders.

She stood in front of the cabin and watched them until they were out of sight.

"That's business," she muttered. "That is bound to settle it one way or another. If he don't see that I've got to the end of my tether and can't go a step further, he's got less sense than I give him credit for."

She went back into the cabin, and shuffled about there a little, but with a discontented and almost disgusted air.

"I wish Beauty was here," she said. "It's amazin' how much I miss him. I don't seem to have the energy to clean up a bit."

A sudden thought struck her, and she snatched up a red shawl, ran out doors, tied the shawl to the end of a pole, and stood the pole up against the cabin.

That was her signal for "Beauty," and she sat down and waited for him.

She did not have long to wait.

As soon as she had gone back into the cabin Muggs crawled out of his hiding-place, glad to get a chance to stretch his limbs again, skirted the base of the hill for a little distance up the canyon and then returned to the cabin.

There was still a chance that Andrew Birkett might discover the loss of his document and return to look for it; but that was a chance that must be taken like the other chances, and there was no danger that suspicion could rest upon "Beauty."

So the late spy boldly opened the door and walked in.

He was joyfully greeted by Bet Rawson, who at once noticed his worn and haggard appearance.

"Why, you poor fellow!" she exclaimed. "I am afraid you have had a tough time. I didn't think it would go so hard with you."

"Sleepin' out in the woods with nothin' to eat ain't apt to make a feller git fat," remarked Muggs. "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

He never spoke a truer word.

"You do looked starved, Beauty, for a fact, and I'm awful sorry for you. I will get you somethin' to eat right away. Hurry and wash up, and you may help me."

The joint efforts of the two produced in a brief time a good and substantial breakfast, and Muggs devoured it voraciously, having no difficulty this time in allowing his appetite to testify to his starvation.

He was so busy stuffing himself that he had no time to talk, and Bet Rawson waited for him patiently, but in a sort of moody fit, until he was through.

Then she filled his pipe, gave him a light, and opened her batteries.

"It was real good of you, Beauty, to come back as quiet as you did. I suppose you saw my signal."

"'Course I did. I was watchin' fur it, half crazy to come in. I saw them two fellers ride away, and then I jest kep' my eyes peeled till the flag riz. Any danger that they mought come back?"

"I should say not, and I'm glad they're gone. I'm kinder worryin' about them, Beauty, and I wish you could help me."

"Wish I knowed how. I'd go my length to help you."

"One of them is queer, Beauty—a mixture of snake and wolf. I don't know whether to believe him or not. Yes, I do know that he ain't to be believed; but the question is, whether he may think it safe to go against me. I wish I could go; but I can't."

"Moughtn't I go, miss? Would it do any good?"

"It might; but there's no getting away from here, and Butte's a long way off. If you had a hoss—"

"Why, bless yer heart! I've got a hoss," cheerfully answered Muggs.

Her glance of sudden surprise might have wilted him; but it did not.

"Got a hoss? What does that mean? You told me that you were set afoot."

"So I was, miss. You don't ketch Simon Peter in no lie. But I've got a hoss, all the same. Come up on him yest'day. Was goin' to tell you about it; but you started in on suthin' else."

"How did you get a hoss, Beauty?"

"Found him up the canyon. Sorter Injun pony, I reckon. Saddle an' bridle on, too, only the bridle's broke."

"Who on earth can have been about here to lose a hoss?"

"Durned if I know, miss. Seems like he'd come a long ways. Reckon he'd got loose an' run off, an' the owner couldn't find him. Anyway, I've got a hoss."

"That's queer. But it's lucky, too. You may go to Butte, then, and I will give you all the money you need. The man I spoke of is named Andrew Birkett, and everybody there knows him. You will find it easy enough to get onto him. If he don't come out here after, say ten or twelve days, or if he goes anywhere else about that time, come back here and let me know. Watch him close, and got onto all his ways and doin's right sharp. Can you do that?"

"You may jest bet yer last dollar that I kin, miss."

"Where's your hoss?"

"T'other side o' the valley, miss."

"Very well. We will get up some grub for you, and you can go over there and start. But you must ride out, so's to let me see you when you go off. I shall miss you lots; but I think you can do me a good turn in Butte."

There was a shade of suspicion in her last injunction; but Muggs did not mind that, he was so glad to get such a good excuse for going away and seeking the very point which he then wanted to reach.

He took the money that was given him and the provisions that were prepared for his journey, and crossed the valley to his corral, where he picked up his horse and weapons and ammunition.

As he rode down the trail he waved an adieu to Bet Rawson, who was watching him from the cabin door.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TROUBLE IN THE BIRKETT CAMP.

ANDREW BIRKETT and Alf Sanders had quite a pleasant trip back to Butte.

The former was highly satisfied with what he had secured by the visit, and the latter was more than pleased with the pay for his service that he had received and was yet to receive.

"It's all right now, Alf," said Birkett, "and I won't forget you."

"There's one queer thing about it, though," replied the Butte official. "You know that I knew that woman. She is Dick Herries's wife; but she signed her name Margaret Tellson."

"That's correct, Alf. Tellson is her maiden name, and the name by which she inherits the property. Those folks at the East needn't know anything about her marriage, which might make more bother. You will certify that she is Margaret Tellson, and I and Josh Cattermole will swear to it, and the authorities at Helena will certify to your signature and position, and all will be legal and as straight as a shingle."

When he reached Butte Andrew Birkett was met by Josh Cattermole, who accompanied him to his lodgings, anxious to learn the result of the journey.

He received the assurance that everything had been satisfactorily arranged so far, and that there was no likelihood of trouble ahead.

"How about Bet Rawson, gov'nor?" inquired Cattermole. "Was she peaceable, or was she inclined to be ugly?"

"She was a bit cranky, Josh, and was crosser than I cared to see her; but I smoothed her down. I've got to go out there, though, in ten days or so, to fetch her away."

"Reckon you'd better make a sure thing o' that, gov'nor. When I saw her last I got the notion that she was powerful skittish and wouldn't stand a durned bit of nonsense."

"I'm not afraid of her, Josh, and it's more than likely that I will give her the fling yet."

"When the other woman's business is settled, mebbe you may, and I reckon you can work that scheme after a bit, if you've got the paper all right."

"You may bet your immortal soul that the paper's all right," triumphantly replied Andrew Birkett. "Here, you can take a look at it."

He thrust his hand into the inside breast-pocket of his coat.

A puzzled look crept into his face as he found nothing there.

Again he felt, but found nothing.

He felt in all his pockets with a similar result.

He emptied them, and turned them inside out; but the important document was not visible.

His countenance disclosed the utmost an-

ger and consternation as he shot out volley after volley of fierce oaths.

"What is the matter?" asked Cattermole.

"Have you lost it?"

"I don't know what has become of it. I am sure that I put it in this pocket, and that I haven't touched it since; but it is gone."

"That's queer."

"Worse than queer. Josh, you must run and find Alf Sanders, and bring him here as quick as you can."

Andrew Birkett paced the room like a tiger in its cage until Josh Cattermole returned with the Butte official.

"You put it in the inside pocket of your coat," said Sanders. "Not a bit of doubt of that."

"I was sure of it," added Birkett. "And I am sure that I haven't touched it since then. Can I have dropped it at the cabin, or left it there? Or did Bet Rawson steal it from me? No; it is not possible that she would have played such a game. But she must have found it. Josh, you will have to ride out there as fast as you can go, and get that paper."

In as brief a time as possible after this interview, Josh Cattermole put in an appearance at Bet Rawson's cabin.

He and his horse bore the marks of hard travel, and both of them were, in fact, pretty well used up.

Bet Rawson, who stepped out of the cabin with her rifle in her hand as she heard the tread of a horse, was more than surprised to see Josh Cattermole there.

"They'll make the trail pretty hot among 'em," she muttered. "Wonder what's up now? Some swindle, I'm keen to bet."

When Cattermole alighted and greeted her she blurted out her surprise.

"Glad to see you, old man, though I wasn't expectin' you. You look as if you'd had a hard pull of it. What in thunder brought you out here?"

"Don't you know?" answered Josh, with a searching glance.

"Would I be askin' you if I did?"

"Haven't you found anythin', Miss Bet?"

"Found anythin'? Somethin' in the way of di'munds? Or silk dresses? Or sealskin sacques? Mighty likely I'd be to find anythin' out here."

"Honest, now, Miss Bet, haven't you found anythin' about the cabin here since the gov'nor went away?"

"No, I hain't found anythin', and I want to know what this stuff means."

"Nothin' in the way of a paper?"

"No sort o' paper. Oh, saered snakes! what are you gittin' at?"

"Then the devil's to pay, for sure."

"Come inside, Josh Cattermole, and I will make you a dram. You look used up. Soon as you feel right you've got to tell me what's up."

Cattermole expressed his willingness to do so, averring that he had come for that purpose.

When he had received his dram and something to eat, he lighted his pipe and began his explanation.

"You know, Miss Bet, that when the gov'nor was out here last he got a paper signed."

"Yes."

"He put it in an inside pocket of his coat, and hung his coat up on a peg, and went to sleep. In the mornin' he got up, put on his coat, and went away."

"You've got it straight, Josh, so far."

"He didn't touch that paper, Miss Bet, from the time he put it in his pocket until he got back to Butte. Then he went to take it out to show it to me, and it was gone. He hunted through all his clothes, but couldn't find a trace of it."

Bet Rawson made no answer, but an expression of utter incredulity pervaded her features.

"He sent me out here to look for it," continued Josh, "thinkin' it might have been dropped here, and that you had found it."

"Nary found," she sententiously responded.

"What could have become of it, then? I don't see how it could have been stolen—unless—"

He pointed significantly at the partition.

"That door was locked," observed Bet, "and the key was on this side."

"Then there's only one other guess to make. He must have lost it on his way back to Butte."

"That's where you're out, Josh Cattermole. The paper wasn't stole, and it wasn't dropped here, and he didn't lose it on his way back to Butte. If he hasn't got it now, he knows where it is."

"Oh, come off! Why do you want to be so cussed suspicious? What do you take him for?"

"I take him for just what he is, and nobody knows what he is better than I do. He is as hard as a mill-stone; but I can see through any mill-stone that's got a hole in it. The game that he's playin' on me is just the sort o' thing I looked for. He put up that job on you, and told you that yarn, because he thought that you would be fool enough to believe it, and that you would come out here and make me believe it. But it won't work—not for a cent. I ain't sayin' Josh Cattermole, that you are in the game with him; but he is usin' you as a tool, and that's the immortal truth."

"What do you mean, Miss Bet? This is too much for me."

"If you can't guess what I mean, you are duller than I take you to be. When Andy Birkett got that paper fixed up, it was agreed that he should settle the business right off, and then come back here and take me East with him. I told him that he had better not fail, and I meant business. His game now is to pretend that he has lost the paper and can't settle the business. Then he means to sneak off, give me the dirty shake, fix up things to suit himself, and steal my share of the plunder. That is exactly the size of it."

"You must be wrong, Miss Bet. I can't believe that he means to do such a trick."

"He must be tofable smart, old man, if he has fooled you. But he can't fool Bet Rawson. I can see through his game as easy as if he was playin' it with his hand open before my eyes. That's all. I've said my say, and you needn't give me another word. Rest here to-night, Josh Cattermole, and when you get back to Butte, I want you to tell the gov'nor, as you call him, just what I've said."

At an early hour next morning, Josh Cattermole mounted and started away.

"Tell Andy Birkett," said Bet Rawson, "that if he don't come out here as he promised, and take me away from this place, there'll be trouble in his camp."

But when Josh Cattermole reached Butte, Andrew Birkett was absent, deep in the developments that followed the arrival of Abner Boggs and the discovery of the body of Jim Boggs.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FAMILY BIBLE.

MUGGS of Muggsville of course told his story at Whitewood as soon as the excitement subsided sufficiently to allow him to do so, and Silver Sam was put in possession of the facts above detailed, up to the departure of his spy from Bet Rawson's cabin.

The paper that had been signed there also passed into his possession, and its importance was fully appreciated by him.

He praised Muggs so highly for his shrewd and successful work, that the knobs on the ugly fellow's face glistened more brightly than ever, and his eyes bulged out fearfully.

He would then gladly have gone to his death for the chief who bestowed upon him such thorough recognition and commendation.

Slevin at once perceived that he had a further duty to perform, and one which called for immediate attention and speedy action.

He had discovered, by the aid of Muggs, the whereabouts of Margaret Tellson, as well as the full design of Andrew Birkett, and it was necessary that he should rescue the woman and thwart the man.

Clearly there was no time to be lost, as Birkett had doubtless discovered the loss of the paper, and would proceed to take other steps to carry out his scheme.

But Dick Herries had a claim upon the young man's time, and his mind was intent just then upon a matter of the deepest interest to himself personally.

Since he had become convinced that his wife had not voluntarily left him, the belief had grown within him that she might be yet

alive, and he was determined to leave no efforts untried to find her.

This was the matter which he pressed upon the attention of Silver Sam whose assistance he naturally desired and expected.

The young man was somewhat embarrassed by the claim just at that time.

Dick Herries was the father of Kate, and for her sake and her father's he was anxious to do all he could to aid in the discovery and recovery of her mother.

But he was strongly inclined to believe that the poor woman had been effectually put out of the way by whoever had been instrumental in her disappearance.

There was a mystery in that affair which it might take a long and patient search to unravel, while the business of rescuing Margaret Tellson was something that was plain and direct.

Besides, the one would probably lose nothing by a little delay, while the other demanded prompt and energetic action.

He endeavored to put the matter before Dick Herries in this shape, as gently but at the same time as forcibly as he could.

But the mine-owner clearly showed his disappointment at this effort to put him off.

"I wish," said he, "that I had tackled Andrew Birkett when he was here. I ought to have squeezed the truth out of the scoundrel then."

"I am afraid it would have done more harm than good to play the game that way," rejoined Slevin. "We must get him in our clutches before we can squeeze him. I have told you, Mr. Herries, that the business I have spoken of, though it is in no way connected with your affairs, may give me such a hold on that man as will enable me to force the truth out of him. I am now pretty sure that it will if it is attended to at once, and when he is forced to tell the truth I more than suspect that we will know what has become of your wife and Kate's mother."

"How long will it take you to carry it through?" inquired Herries.

"Only a little while, I believe. I will start to-morrow morning, if you will agree to that, taking with me a few good men, including Matt Grace and Muggs. Before I leave I will tell you just what the business is that takes me away, and I am sure that you will say that I am right in what I propose to do."

"Very well, Sam. I must submit to your judgment in this matter; but I shall rely upon you to help me as soon as you can and as far as you can."

"You can rely upon me, sir, to any extent."

That afternoon Silver Sam had an interview with Kate Herries.

Not that he did not have many interviews with her while he was at Whitewood, but this was a special and a particular one.

It concerned, among other things, the highly interesting question of marriage.

In the course of the interview a point was raised as to the age of the lady who expected to enter into the matrimonial relation.

"It is something of a compliment to me, Sam," said she, "when you doubt if I am as old as I say I am, but at the same time you are not at all complimentary when you question my assertion."

"I don't question it, my dear," earnestly responded Sam. "I only say—"

"Yes, you put it in a very nice shape; but you doubted my word, and I am going to prove to you that I am truthful, even in the matter of my own age."

She went to the cupboard and brought out a large and well-worn book, the nature of which Sam easily recognized.

"This," said Kate, "is our family Bible—my mother's Bible—and you will understand that it is something sacred. You don't often see anything like it out here, I guess, but we have clung to this wherever we have gone and whatever we have done."

She opened the book, and turned over the leaves until she came to some pages that were partly blank and partly written on.

"Here is our Family Record," said she. "It contains the date of the marriage of my father and mother, with the date of my birth and the date of my dead mother's birth. Look and see for yourself."

Silver Sam looked at the first page, that which was headed "Marriages."

As he read an entry there, he started back with an exclamation that astonished the girl.

"What is the matter, Sam?" she earnestly demanded. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Something like it," he replied. "If I haven't gone crazy, I have just come to my senses."

He put his finger on the page.

"Was that your mother's name before she was married?" he demanded.

"Of course it was," answered Kate. "What on earth is the matter?"

Sam rushed to the open window, and yelled at the top of his voice:

"Muggs! Muggs!"

The gentleman from mythical Muggsville happened to be sunning himself at the corner of the house, and he answered immediately.

"Muggs, I want you to run up to the mine as fast as you can go, and tell Mr. Herries that he is wanted here right away. Nothing to scare him, mind, but important business."

Muggs was off like a flash.

"What is the matter, Sam?" eagerly demanded Kate. "What on earth has struck you to make you act so strangely? What has father got to do with it?"

"Wait a little, dear. Wait till your father comes. It is nothing bad, I assure you. It is a great blessing—the greatest of blessings, provided we take hold of it at once. Yes, we must jump at it—fly at it—must start at once."

"But what is it? May I not know?"

"You shall know it all directly. Please wait a little."

"I am afraid that you have really gone crazy."

"Please wait a little."

This was all she could get out of him until Dick Herries arrived, breathless with the haste that had brought him to the house.

"What's the matter?" he gasped.

Silver Sam ran to him as he came in, and seized and wrung both his hands.

"Matter?" exclaimed the young man.

"The best matter you ever heard or dreamed of. Kate is the cause of it."

He dragged Dick Herries to the table, and pointed to the page that was open in the Bible.

"Do you see that name written there? Margaret Tellson? The maiden name of your wife? Kate showed it to me. Who could ever have thought that things would work out like this?"

"What is the matter, Slevin?" demanded Dick Herries. "What do you mean?"

"Father," whispered Kate, "I am afraid that Sam has gone crazy."

"Crazy?" exclaimed Sam. "Indeed I am crazy—crazy with joy. That is the name of the woman I have been looking for—the woman I am after. That is the case I spoke to you about—the case that is taking me away from here. You are on that case, the same that I am, but a great deal more so, thank God! Your wife is alive! Do you hear that, man? Your wife is alive, and I know where she is!"

"God in heaven!" exclaimed Dick Herries as he sunk into a chair. "What is this you are telling me?"

"If you are not crazy, Sam," implored Kate, "I beg you to explain your meaning."

"I will, my dear, as soon as I can calm down a bit."

Then he began to tell his story with coolness and deliberation.

Hints of this he had already given to Dick Herries, who was thus able to guess at a part of what was coming.

But the mine-owner was quite unprepared for the full disclosures of the villainy of Andrew Birkett that were made to him, and especially for the culmination of that scoundrel's scheme in the paper which was signed at Bet Rawson's cabin, and which was exhibited to him by Silver Sam.

The signature was clearly that of his wife, and the strong man wept as he perceived how feebly the characters had been traced.

Muggs was again the hero of the hour, and more so than ever.

When Slevin told how his faithful and efficient spy had watched and waited until he gained possession of that important document, Muggs was overwhelmed with praise and even with caresses, until the knobs on his face seemed about to burst into bloom, and his eyes threatened to leave his head.

"I have been telling you, Mr. Herries,"

said Sam, "that the business I have mentioned to you had no relation to your affairs, except in so far as I hoped by its means to get a hold on Andrew Birkett and force the truth from him; but this discovery puts a new face on the affair, and since the woman I was seeking proves to be your wife and Kate's mother the duty of rescuing her from the clutches of that scoundrel becomes more pressing than ever."

"Come, then!" eagerly exclaimed Dick Herries. "We must not lose a moment. No doubt that villain will take other steps to accomplish his purpose since he has discovered the loss of the paper."

"I don't believe he will get ahead of us much," replied Sam. "There is a short cut through the hills, and Muggs knows it, I believe, if I should fail to find it. We will start at once, and will ride constantly, night and day, as far as we can without killing our horses."

There was nothing to hinder this, as Angus Dameron, though still helpless and speechless, was otherwise in such a fair condition of health that he could safely be left to the care of Dr. Kline and Kate.

Hasty preparations were made for the journey, and before nightfall the party set out.

It was composed of Dick Herries, Sam Slevin, Matt Grace, Muggs, and two good men of Whitewood, a force that was believed to be quite sufficient for all possible emergencies.

They struck into the hills toward the north, taking the route which Silver Sam was following when he was unexpectedly recalled.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"FOR THE NEW AND THE OLD!"

BET RAWSON was more restless than ever after the departure of Josh Cattermole.

She seemed to be possessed by an unquiet spirit that would not allow her to stay indoors, or to take her ease in any manner whatever except when night and weariness drove her to bed.

There was a perpetual frown on her face, and her vocabulary of profanity was exhausted in mutterings that were closely connected with the name of Andrew Birkett.

She no longer took any interest in her household affairs, and had scarcely patience enough to cook the necessary meals for herself and her prisoner.

When she was outside her strolling was merely an aimless "rampage," except when she took her station on an elevation that commanded a good view of the trail that led toward Butte, down which she looked long and anxiously.

She looked as if she was expecting somebody, and she was, if her wish could have been said to amount to an expectation.

She was looking for Andrew Birkett, and for "Beauty," and she hardly cared which of them should chance to come, but was anxious to see one of them, that an end might be put to the suspense which was worrying and wearying her.

In the mean time she did something so strikingly unusual that it vastly astonished one other person.

That person was the prisoner behind the partition.

Bet Rawson took her out, made a companion of her, left the door of her room unlocked, and otherwise treated her as a free woman and a friend.

More than that. She took her out of doors, and walked with her, and encouraged her to stroll about, to inhale the balmy air and enjoy the soft spring weather.

Thus the color speedily came back to the poor prisoner's face, and the light dawned in her eyes again, and she began to regain her lost activity.

Margaret Tellson, as she was known there, was not slow to express her surprise at this change in her treatment.

"I want you to get strong again," answered Bet Rawson. "We are both waiting—you and I—to be set free, and I reckon we're waitin' for somethin' that won't come to us unless we make it come."

"What do you mean, Miss Rawson?"

"I mean that we're swindled, unless I miss my guess worse than I ever did afore. Andy Birkett got you to sign that paper, and he promised that he would come back here to take me away and send you to your friends."

He ain't goin' to do either of those things. He now pretends that he's lost the paper, and that is to stand as his excuse for breakin' his promise."

"Merciful Heaven!"

"If we want Heaven to be merciful to us, Mrs. Tellson, we've got to be merciful to ourselves. If he means to trick us that way, and I hain't the least doubt that he does, our game is to light out of here and get even with him. If we don't do that, Bet Rawson ain't the sort of circumstance she takes herself to be."

"But how can we get away from here—two women, and afoot?"

"Just now I'm waitin' for Beauty, who ought to be gettin' out here about this time. If he goes back on me, as I reckon he will—everybody goes back on me—we will have to look out for ourselves. If he comes, his horse will do to carry you away, and he and I can foot it. If he don't come, and I reckon that'll be the upshot of the business, you and I will have to foot it. For that scheme I want you to get strong and healthy, and it seems as if we ought to pull through."

That was what it was bound to come to, as Bet Rawson said, and that is what it did come to.

In vain she waited for Andrew Birkett, or "Beauty," and in vain she gazed from the best point of view down the trail that led to Butte.

Neither of them appeared, and no person was visible coming from that direction.

"Everybody goes back on me," said the Amazon at last. "Come, Mrs. Tellson, you and I must strike out for ourselves."

"What can we do, Miss Rawson?"

"I will tell you what I mean to do. I mean to take you to your friends, and then I mean to get even with Andy Birkett. And if I don't get even with him for good and all, may I be everlastin'ly chawed up!"

"But it is so far to anywhere."

"We will take it easy, my dear. Whenever you get tired we will stop and rest. But you seem to be pretty strong now, and we will take plenty of victuals, and you needn't be afraid of man or beast when I'm about."

Bet Rawson took her rifle with plenty of ammunition, carrying also much the larger portion of the provisions with which the two women were loaded.

So they started on their long and uncertain tramp.

They were not long in discovering that it was no child's play, and it proved to be more painful and uncertain than they had expected it to be.

The trail was not particularly plain, even to experienced eyes, and Andrew Birkett and Josh Cattermole had traveled by certain landmarks and signs which were well known to them, rather than by following previous tracks.

But the two women had no such aids, and the tracks, such as they were, had been nearly obliterated by the rains and the spring vegetation.

Consequently, they had not gone far when they missed the trail and lost their way.

They then traveled, as it happened, in a sort of a circuit, coming out at a point which Bet Rawson declared they had certainly passed before.

"We are lost!" exclaimed Mrs. Tellson. "We will die of starvation here in the wilderness, and there is no hope for us."

"Well, I'll be durned!" was the response of her bewildered companion.

But it was better to keep moving than to remain idle, and they pushed on into the hills again.

As the night of that day drew on, Mrs. Tellson was so completely broken down by weariness and anxiety that she declared herself unable to go any further.

Just then Bet Rawson caught sight of a light a little further up the narrow valley through which they were passing.

"It must be some camper's fire," said she. "Anyhow, it's human critturs of some kind, and we can't be any worse off than we are now. Brace up, Margaret, and lean on me if you want to. We've got to reach that light, anyhow."

They did reach it, and found it to be a fire built by a solitary camper for the purpose of cooking his supper.

The camper was a rough-looking mountaineer, probably a prospector; but he received them kindly, though with surprise which he did not attempt to conceal.

Bet Rawson told a portion of their story in a few words, and his sympathies were immediately enlisted.

"Sit right down by the fire," said he. "You're welcome to everything I've got, and I'll do the best I can to make you comfortable. When you've had a good rest, all you've got to do is to tell me what you want and it'll be done, if Jack Marvine can do it."

Bet Rawson thanked him heartily, and the two women availed themselves of his kindly offer, resting near the fire while Jack Marvine went to cut some boughs with which to make them a better couch.

He was still absent when Bet Rawson heard the sound of horses' feet in the valley below.

She seized her rifle and jumped up, facing the sound.

The thought of discovery and pursuit by Andrew Birkett was haunting her, and she could not bear to be pounced upon by him in her forlorn condition, when she had so miserably failed in her attempt to follow and find him.

But there he was, right before her eyes.

Three horsemen were coming rapidly up the valley.

They were Andrew Birkett, Josh Cattermole and Alf Sanders!

Birkett uttered a cry of delight as he approached the fire and came in full view of the two women.

"Here you are, now!" he shouted. "I dropped onto your game, my lady, quicker'n a shot. You stole off and carried away my property. But she's here, I see. I've got her now, safe enough."

"No, you hain't!" stubbornly replied Bet Rawson.

"Do you think so? You will learn better right soon. All's over between you and me, my lady. You've broken the bargain, and now you may go to blazes. But I mean to have her."

Mrs. Tellson screamed and crouched down, but Bet Rawson stood her ground.

She saw a chance to "get even" at last—to revenge herself for past slights and present insults.

"No you won't," was her determined reply.

"I won't hey? We'll settle that mighty quick."

She raised her rifle to her shoulder, and a vengeful gleam came into her dark eyes.

"Clear out of this, Andy Birkett! If you don't get away from here, I'll send you to kingdom come."

He answered her threat with a scornful laugh; but it was an unnatural laugh, and he hesitated.

"I'm not going to stand any foolishness, Bet Rawson. You don't mean it."

"I mean business from the word go, you liar and swindler. If you come another foot nearer to me, I'll bore a hole through your head as sure as I'm a livin' woman."

Mrs. Tellson crouched on the ground, frightened out of her wits.

Jack Marvine, coming down the hill with a load of boughs, dropped it and hurried to the scene; but he had left his weapons at the camp, and could do nothing until he reached them.

Josh Cattermole and Alf Sanders spoke to their companion, urging him not to be too rash.

But he was wild with rage, and gave no heed to their words.

"Come on, boys!" he shouted, as he spurred his horse forward.

Bet Rawson pulled the trigger, her rifle cracked, and Andrew Birkett reeled and fell.

"That's even for the new and the old!" she cried, as she grounded the smoking weapon.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

STRAIGHTENED UP.

NEAR the close of a hard day's travel, and just after they had passed the crest of a difficult ridge, Silver Sam and his men entered the head of a ravine on the other side.

As they descended the ravine, it became deeper, until the hills almost shut off the

fading light of day, and after awhile it widened into a valley.

"Perhaps we had better camp here," said the leader. "Our horses are nearly broken down, and every one of us, I suppose, feels the need of food and rest."

"Hain't got much furdur to go," remarked Muggs.

"Indeed! Are you sure of what you are saying? Do you know this country as well as that?"

"Reckon I ort to know it. I hain't circilated about here fur nuthin'."

"How far are we from Bet Rawson's cabin?"

"Not more'n five mile, I should say."

"Do you hear that, Mr. Herries? We have not more than five miles to go."

"Indeed I did hear it, Sam, and it made me jump."

"We won't think of camping here, then, but will move on and get there to-night."

"Of course we will. The thought that my wife may be in the power of that scoundrel makes me tireless."

As they rode on down the valley, Slevin suddenly stopped his horse and pointed ahead.

"Seems to me that there's a light down there," he said. "Don't you see it, Mr. Herries?"

"I think I do. Right ahead of us."

"Smell o' smoke, too," observed Muggs. "Somebody's built a fire."

"That's what it is, I suppose. Nothing to bother us, anyhow."

They had gone but a few steps further, when a rifle-shot startled the evening air.

It also startled Silver Sam and his party.

"Come on!" he shouted. "That means mischief."

They rode toward the light as fast as their tired steeds would carry them.

A riderless horse came galloping toward them, and was caught by one of the party.

When they reached Jack Marvine's camp, the light of the fire showed them the scene plainly.

A man was lying on the ground, apparently dead, and near him were two mounted men, who were doing nothing, and seemed to be undecided what to do.

Jack Marvine had returned to his camp, had seized his rifle, and had taken his position at the side of Bet Rawson.

Another woman was crouched on the ground near the fire.

All looked up as Slevin's party came clattering down the valley, and Jack Marvine and Bet Rawson raised their rifles as if expecting a fresh foe.

The woman near the fire sprung up with a cry of joy.

"My husband!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Dick!"

She ran forward feebly, but her spasmodic strength was soon exhausted, and she would have fallen had not Dick Herries sprung from his horse and caught her in his arms.

The situation was speedily explained, first by Jack Marvine, and then more fully by Mrs. Herries and Bet Rawson.

The latter female, however, was especially impressed by the presence of Muggs, with whom she had a bone to pick, and was not slow to begin the picking.

"Where in thunder did you spring from, Beauty?" she indignantly demanded. "You promised to come back to my shanty and help me out."

"Wasn't I comin'?" he answered with a grin. "You told me to look arter that chap, and I had to foller him up."

"I wanted you awful bad, Beauty."

"Wish I could ha' been thar when you lit out. But I didn't miss it by much. You ain't more'n about five miles from your shanty now."

"Do you mean that, Beauty? Have we been travelin' all this time and not got five miles from that blasted place?"

"That's about the size of it, missus."

"Well, I'll be durned!"

Josh Cattermole and Alf Sanders acted as if they were in the wrong place, but did not know how to back out of it with any sort of credit.

Silver Sam noticed their embarrassment and helped them out of the difficulty.

"I know you two scamps," said he, "and I will know where to put you when I meet you again. You had better clear out of here

before somebody gets mad and hurts you. You can bury your brother scoundrel before you go, or leave him to us, just as you please."

They decided to leave him, and silently sneaked away without the formality of saying good-by.

As it was then useless to go on to Bet Rawson's cabin, the entire party spent the night at Jack Marvine's camp.

It was arranged that Silver Sam should hurry back to Whitewood to carry the good news to Kate Herries, leaving the rest of the party to come on slowly with the women.

So he set out at daybreak the next morning, mounted on Jack Marvine's fresh horse, and accompanied by Muggs, whose pony had not learned what it was to get tired.

The others followed at their leisure, two of the horses being given up to the women, while some of the men took turns at walking.

When they reached Whitewood there was a joyful reunion, and Muggs was again made much of by all except Bet Rawson, who could not easily forgive him for the underhand way in which he had got the best of her.

But she had need of forgiveness for herself, as the part she had played in connection with Andrew Birkett had been by no means free from moral and legal objections.

On the principle that "all's well that ends well," her evil deeds were overlooked in consideration of the good she finally wrought.

She forgave Muggs, and ultimately married Jack Marvine, and made him a good and useful wife.

He proved to be the same Jack Marvine who had been the mutual friend of Angus Dameron and Jim Boggs, and he had in his possession the agreement which they had given to him for safe-keeping.

Its production disposed of the claims of Abner Boggs; but that individual, though regarded as undeserving, in time received a sum of money equal to the amount of the "pile" which his brother possessed at his death.

The inheritance of Mrs. Herries was easily settled and secured, without any unnecessary delay.

It came in time to be of much use to Kate when her husband, Sam Slevin, became a partner with her father in the mine.

This happened through the death of Angus Dameron, who recovered before that event sufficiently to make a will, by which he directed the sale of his interest in the mine, and the payment of the purchase-money to his heirs at the East.

So Silver Sam became a settled and solid citizen, and Muggs of Muggsville continued to be his right-hand man and Kate's special favorite.

THE END.

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